

Archaeological Field Unit

**National Spiritualist Church  
5 Thompson's Lane, Cambridge:  
Archaeological Evaluation and Monitoring**

Tony Baker and Scott Kenney

January 2004

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. A233

Commissioned by E & P Building Design

**National Spiritualist Church**  
**5 Thompson's Lane, Cambridge:**  
**Archaeological Evaluation and Monitoring**  
(TL 4482 5893)

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2004

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## SUMMARY

*The Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trench at the rear of the National Spiritualist Church at 5, Thompson's Lane, Cambridge (TL4482 5893). The work was carried out in advance of extensions to the existing building. Subsequent visits were made to record the stratigraphic sequence exposed by the foundation trenches of the new extension.*

*The trenches were excavated by hand, revealing a series of mostly undisturbed horizontal layers dating to the medieval to modern periods and possibly earlier. The foundation trenches revealed a number of post-medieval foundations, some of which consisted of stone.*

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## Drawing Conventions

### Sections

Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	—————
Cut - Conjectured	-----
Soil Horizon	-----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Top of Natural	—————
Top Surface	—————
Break in Section	-----
Modern	
Brick Wall	
Cut Number	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">118</span>
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m ODN X

### Plans

Limit of Excavation	—————
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Sondages/Machine Strip	-----
Illustrated Section	————— S.14
Deposits	
Modern	
Sondage	
Cut Number	118

**National Spiritualist Church, 5 Thompson's Lane, Cambridge:  
Archaeological Evaluation and Monitoring  
(TL 4482 5893)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 24th of July 2003 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an evaluation by trial trench at the rear of the National Spiritualist Church at 5, Thompson's Lane, Cambridge (TL 4482 5893). The work was carried out at the request of E & P Building Design and was undertaken in order to fulfil a Brief for archaeological investigation issued by Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Archaeologist, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office. Following this work, further visits were made between 30th September and 16th December 2003 to monitor foundation trenches.

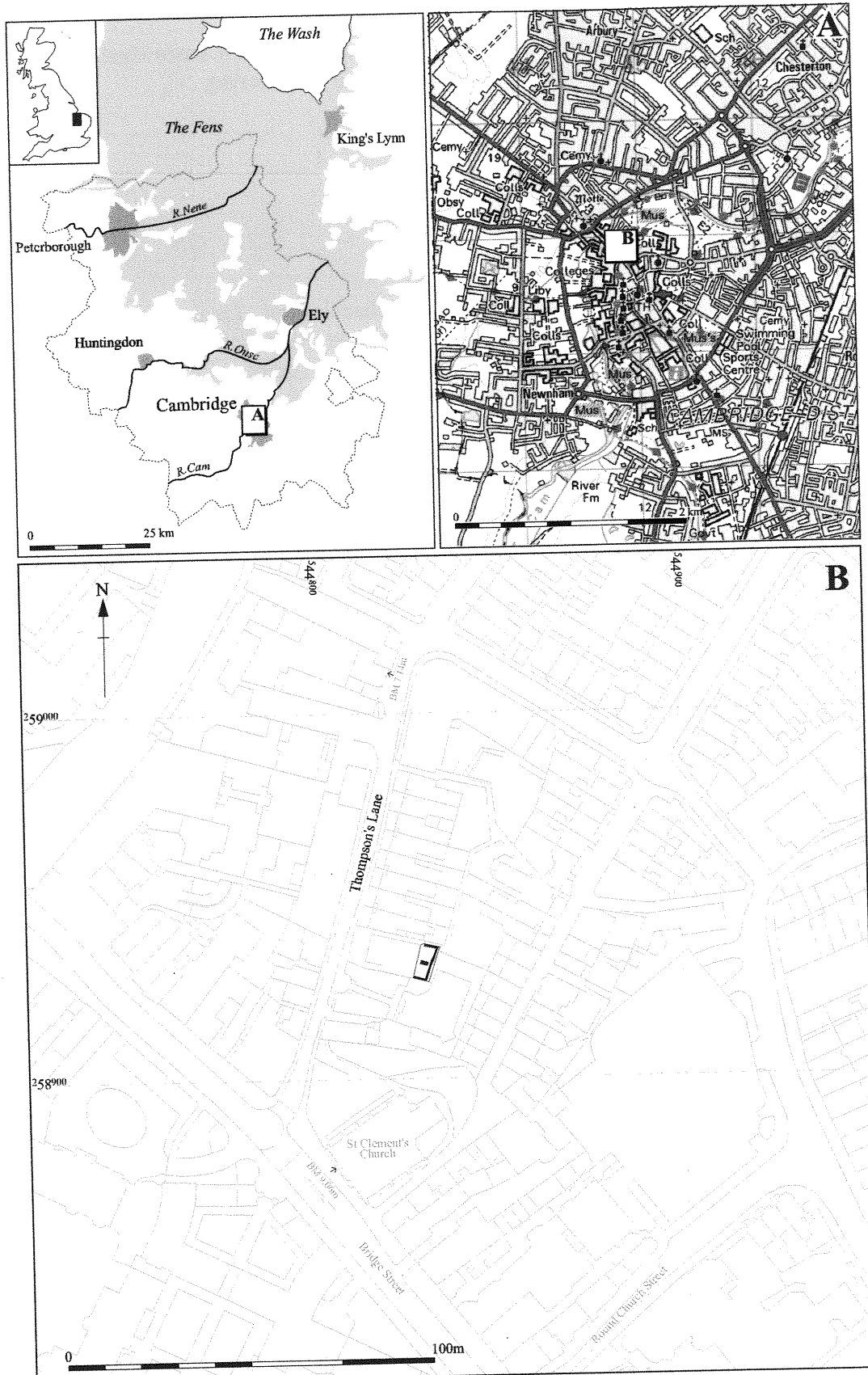
The site is in the core of the historic city of Cambridge, 40m north of St Clement's Church and 120m east of the Great Bridge across the river Cam. The proposed development (Planning Application C/02/0585/FP) includes construction of an extension to the existing building. An area of 2m<sup>2</sup> was investigated in the evaluation trench and then the foundation trenches were examined to establish the stratigraphic sequence.

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

According to the British Geological Survey Map (Cambridge, Sheet 188, 1:50,000) the development site is situated on 1st Terrace river gravels. Natural geology was not encountered in the evaluation this is therefore unconfirmed. The site is flat and has been levelled with the land to the east being some 0.8m deeper than the present ground surface on the development site. The land to the south slopes down towards the west.

**3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The site is an area of high archaeological potential with remains from the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods being found in the vicinity. Many of the finds recorded in the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record are stray finds from the river and are related to the nearby Magdalene Bridge (Great Bridge) and use of the river for transport and trade.



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**Figure 1** Location of Trenches (black) with Development Area outlined (in red).

### **3.1 Prehistoric**

Early prehistoric artefacts and faunal remains have been found in the gravels around the town during quarrying (Taylor 1999) but none are recorded from the vicinity of the development area. Later prehistoric remains have been found along the river flood plain, which may have been used as pasture during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Settlement and burial evidence from these periods has been found on the higher land, away from the river.

During the Iron Age settlements were established along the Cam valley, with ditched field systems and enclosed farmsteads. Cambridge was established at the bridging point of the river close to the boundaries of major tribal units (the Trinovantes, the Catuvellauni and the Iceni). Fortifications were also established around Cambridge, along prehistoric routes, at Wandlebury, Arbury Camp and War Ditches.

To the north-west of the river, on Castle Hill, a Late Iron Age defended enclosure was built which controlled the routes from the north and west down to the crossing of the Cam. At this time the settlement at Cambridge may have become a regional centre for the Catuvellauni (Taylor 1999). Again, little from this period has been found on the lower lying land close to the development area.

### **3.2 Roman**

The Iron Age settlement on Castle Hill was superseded by Roman settlement which controlled access to the river crossing place. Extensive remains have been found to the north-west of the river, extending up Castle Hill (SMR 11521) from an earthen bank along the south-eastern side of Chesterton Lane (SMR 4664 [CB5636] UAD Record 92). Roman domestic remains have also been found in the grounds of Magdelene College (SMR 15496).

Roman artefacts have been found whilst dredging the river (SMR 3811 [CB4652] and 4610 [CB5564]) and every opportunity has been taken to trace remnants of the Roman bridge (SMR 9949 [CB11806]) but to date no firm evidence has been found. To the south-east of the river, Roman finds have been found along Bridge Street and in interventions to either side of Bridge Street (SMR 4798 [CB5808]). Most of these appear to be residual and frequently mixed with Anglo-Saxon and later remains (SMR 4642 [CB5599] and 4796 [CB5799]).

### **3.3 Anglo-Saxon**

No clearly defined Anglo-Saxon settlement has been found in the vicinity of the development area but Anglo-Saxon artefacts have also been dredged from the river and settlement is known from Magdelene Street and Castle Street.

From the end of the 7th century there are written references to the town and it is clear that the river acted as a significant route at this time (Taylor 1999). The crossing place at this point was very important and in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 875 the name *Granta Brycge* appears. In the 8th century the town was under Offa's Mercian control and was concentrated on the north-western bank of the River Cam.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 875 also records how the Danish kings went from Repton to Cambridge (Taylor 1999). It was after this 'invasion' that a settlement was established on the south-eastern bank of the river and the parish of St. Clement is indicative of this Danish influence. The Danes created a ditched, inland port on the Cam in the area which was enclosed by what was later known as the King's Ditch (UAD Record 6).

### 3.4 Medieval

Between the church of St Clement and the river, now known as Quayside, is an area which was once the heart of the medieval wharves and quays with development along the river and stretching along Bridge Street (SMR 4582, UAD Event Record 456). Excavations in the area suggest that before the 16th century the area was subject to frequent flooding with structures being built on the gravel terrace near St Clement's church (SMR 5892). Geological boreholes have produced decaying timbers (possibly piles) that may be part of the medieval revetment (UAD Record 98 [Event Record 8]).

The earlier Anglo-Saxon and Danish ditches were consolidated to form an eastern boundary to the early town around 1215. From this period until the late 18th century the King's Ditch was an open ditch which in its early manifestation was little more than an open sewer. The King's Ditch (UAD Record 416) ran to the north-east of the development area and much of the land it enclosed close to the river, but away from the quay, was pasture land which was seasonally flooded.

During the medieval period Thompson's Lane was known as Harlestone Lane (UAD Record 564).

### 3.5 Post-medieval

Thompson's Lane excavations in 1982 (Firman and Pullinger 1988, SMR 5892, UAD Record 99, UAD Event Record 133) revealed residual Roman pottery. There was nothing to indicate that the area contained Anglo-Saxon, Danish or medieval structures and the results suggest that it was a flood plain used as open land for dumping rubbish or as seasonal pasture. In the post-medieval period clay pipes, building material and horticultural ceramics were being fired in kilns in the area and horn working was being carried out. The excavations revealed timber shoring indicating that the river was much wider



until the end of the medieval period. A gravel terrace rises on the eastern side of Thompson's Lane and it is on this that building may have taken place.

The development site is approximately 40m to the north of the 13th century church of St. Clement. Maps from 1574 and 1592 show the land as pasture enclosed by the King's Ditch. By the late 18th century much of this land had been divided up into plots and 19th century maps show buildings along Thompson's Lane.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

A single trench 2m x 1m was excavated by hand to 1.30m deep and to 1.55m in one corner. Each identified deposit was cleaned, excavated and recorded according to AFU standards and practices. Drawings were executed at scales of 1:50 and 1:20 and a full photographic record was compiled. Foundation trenches (0.6m wide and approximately 1.00m deep and 17.70m long) were monitored both during and after excavation.

#### **5 RESULTS**

##### **5.1 Evaluation trench (Fig. 2 and Section 2, Fig. 3)**

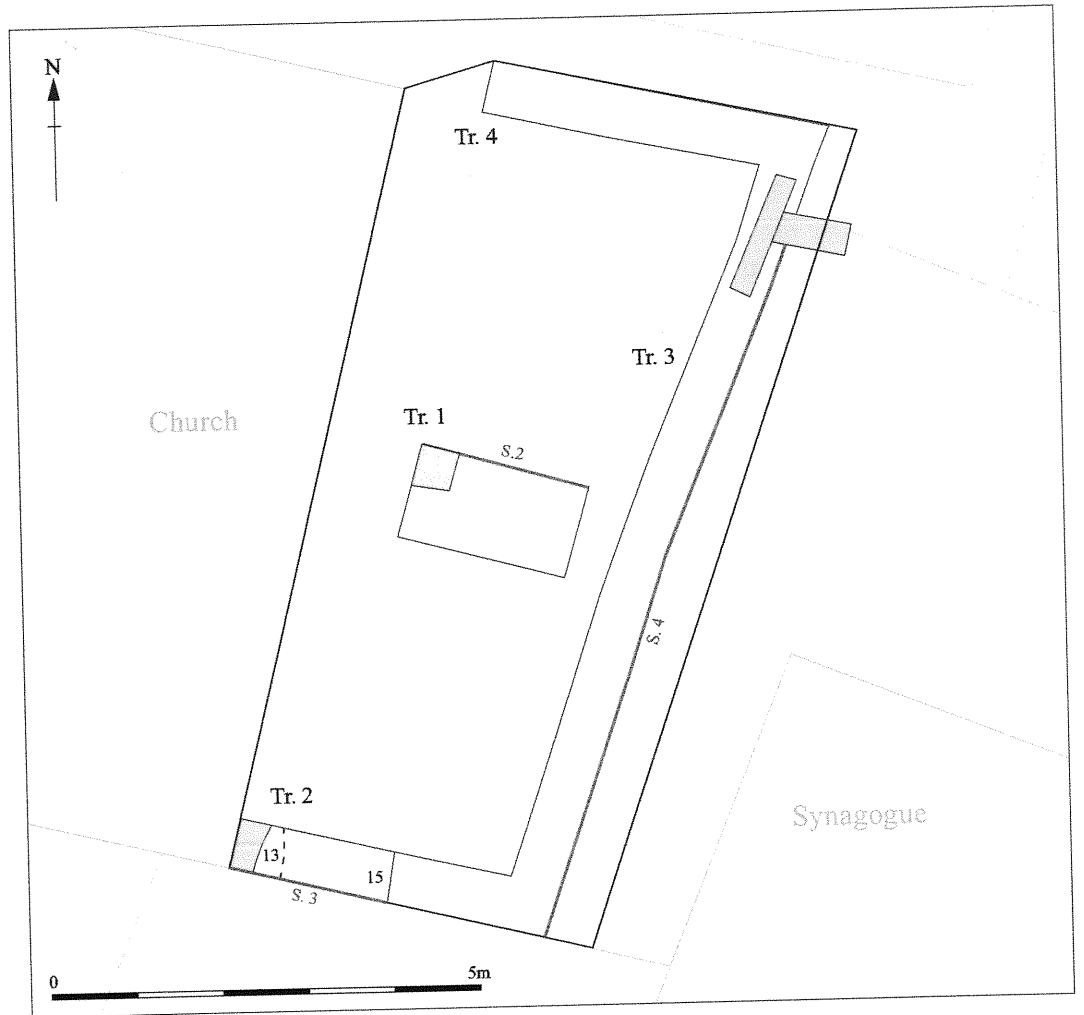
A single trench was excavated in the small enclosed yard to the rear of the Spiritualist Church at 5 Thompson's Lane, Cambridge.

The trench was 2.00m long, 1.00m wide and aligned approximately east-west. It was excavated by hand to a depth of 1.30m, with a small area at the north-western corner deepened to 1.55m.

Natural geology was not encountered anywhere within the trench. The deposits revealed comprised a simple series of horizontally stratified layers, with limited 19th to 20th century truncation of the upper layers.

The earliest deposit (8) was a pale brownish grey, clay and sandy silt with occasional small gravel stones and snail shells. Due to its location at the base of the small sondage, little of this deposit was excavated and its full extent is unknown. The single sherd of Samian pottery recovered may be residual, as Roman pottery was also present in overlying medieval deposits.

Sealing layer 8 was layer 7, a 0.60m thick dark brown sandy silt with gravel stones less than 50mm, occasional smaller chalk fragments and very occasional flecks of charcoal and brick/tile. Over 100 sherds of pottery were recovered from this deposit along with some animal bone and oyster shell.



**Figure 2** Trench Plan

The pottery included up to a dozen different medieval fabric types (see Appendix 1), and both kitchen and table wares were present. The highly decorated nature of the table wares indicates a date range of 1200–1350. A small, folded strip of copper alloy was also found. This deposit may represent an occupation or midden layer.

Layer 7 was overlain by layer 6, a mid-pale brownish grey sandy and clayey silt with occasional gravel stones and rare flecks of charcoal. It was 0.40m thick and contained 15 sherds of pottery. Animal bone and oyster shell were again present in lesser quantities, along with a small fragment of possible copper working slag. The pottery fragments recovered indicated a broadly similar date range to layer 7, although the small amount of table ware present appeared less decorated and may therefore extend the date range to 1500.

Layer 6 was overlain by layer 5, a 0.20m thick deposit of fairly dark grey, sandy silt with gravel stones and occasional small fragments of chalk and brick/tile. Four sherds of pottery were recovered from this layer and date it to 1500+.

Layer 5 was overlain by layer 4, a similar deposit 0.26m thick, in which small fragments of coal and cinder were additionally present and the fragments of brick and tile were larger, up to 100mm. Three sherds of pottery and a fragment of clay tobacco pipe stem were recovered from this deposit, which probably represents the most recently cultivated garden soil.

Layer 4 was cut by a relatively modern posthole (3), the only cut feature present in the trench. It was roughly circular, 0.40m in diameter and 0.46m deep. Its fill (2) was a very dark grey ashy silt with frequent small cinders and many brick and tile fragments.

The posthole was sealed by layer 1, a 0.08m thick layer of clean sharp sand which represents the bedding of recent hard surfacing (removed).

## **5.2 Foundation Trench Monitoring**

Further monitoring work was carried out during the excavation of foundation trenches for the new building. The sections of the trenches were cleaned, photographed and drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trenches are numbered anti-clockwise from south to north and features and deposits numbered consecutively.

### *5.2.1 Trench 2 (Section 3, Fig. 3)*

The foundation trench for the wall of 5 Thompson's Lane extended 0.74m below the present ground surface. To the east the foundation trench (Trench 2) for the proposed extension was 1.35m deep. At no point was natural geology encountered. The earliest deposits visible in this trench were a series of layers towards the eastern part of the site.

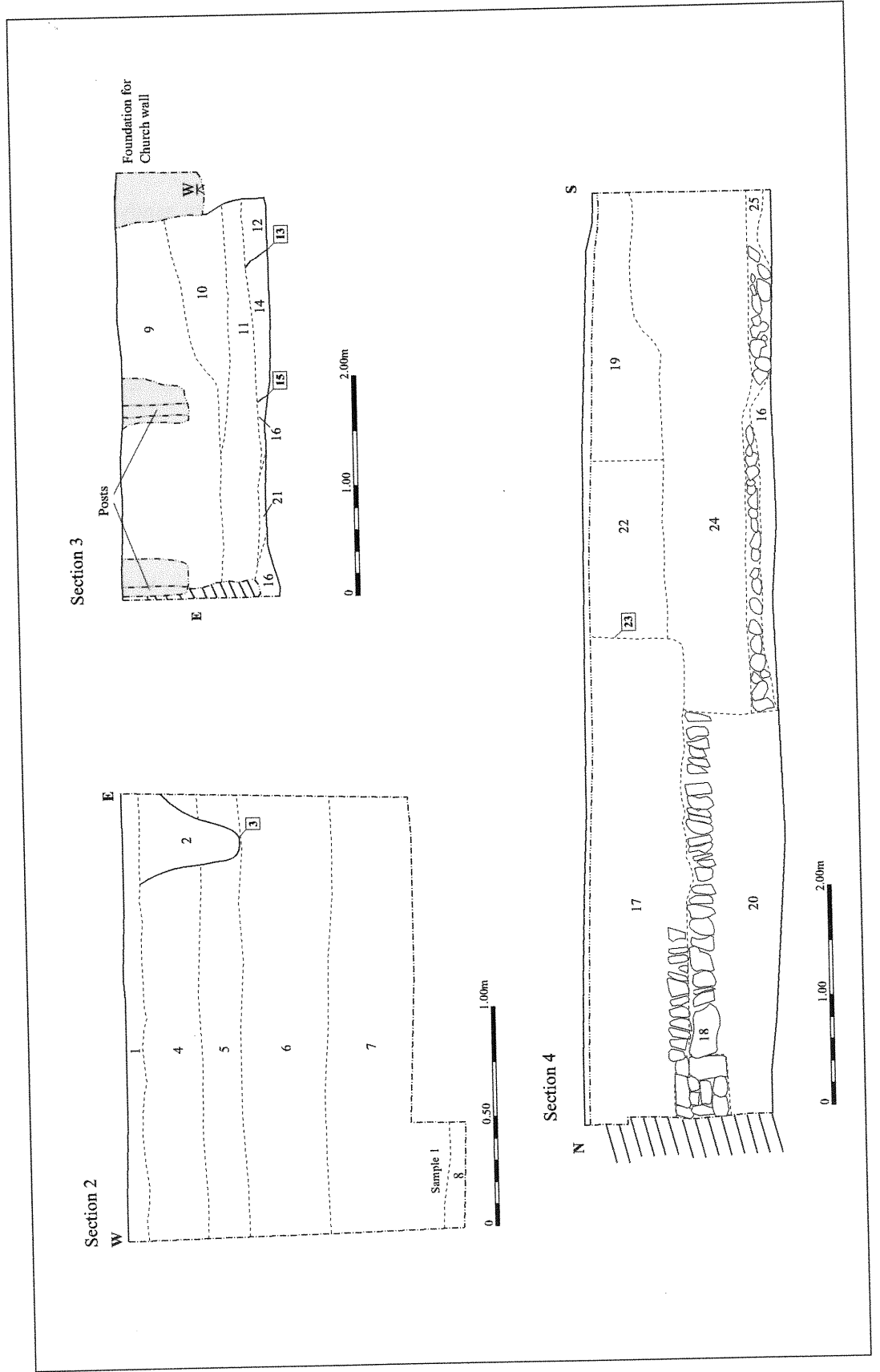


Figure 3 Drawn Sections

Layer 26 was composed of very pale olive white crushed chalk with occasional pale grey silt mottles. This layer was very firm and contained rare charcoal flecks. Layer 26 was sealed by a very dark brown humic layer (21) which was sealed by a very firm chalk/clunch layer (16) which contained rare charcoal flecks.

Layer 16 was cut by a feature (15) which appeared to be the edge of a ditch running approximately north-south across the foundation trench. This feature was over 2.50m wide and contained fill 14, a mixed and mottled mid brown grey silty sandy clay with occasional pieces of soft chalk. This fill contained very occasional fragments of oyster shell and flecks of charcoal together with two sherds dated 1200-1350.

Deposit 14 was cut, towards the western end of the trench, by a possible recut of ditch 15. This edge (13) was straight and sloping at approximately 60°. The only visible fill in this feature was 12, a mid brown grey slightly sandy clay silt with occasional small stones.

All the above features and deposits were sealed by deposit 11 – a firm, mid brown grey clay silt 0.18m thick with occasional small stones, rare charcoal flecks and fragments of pottery, tile and oyster shell.

Overlying deposit 11 was deposit 10, a firm mid brown grey faintly clay sandy silt with occasional to moderate stones, occasional brick, tile, limestone and chalk fragments and moderately frequent chalk and charcoal flecks. This deposit contained fragments of animal bone and pottery and was 0.52m thick at the western end of the trench but tapered out 2.50m east of the present church wall. This deposit is the same as deposit 5, noted in Trench 1.

Sealing deposit 10 was layer 9 which was up to 0.90m thick. This was a very dark grey and black soft ashy layer with cinders and occasional 19th century brick and tile fragments and pieces of rusty iron.

A post-medieval brick wall (25 and 24, see below) cut the above deposits and extended north-south from the corner of Trench 2 along Trench 3 for 4.70m.

The latest features visible in the north-facing section of Trench 2 were two wooden fence posts (with their associated postholes).

### 5.2.2 Trench 3 (Section 4, Fig. 3)

Trench 3 was 8.50m long. There had been extensive post-medieval disturbance in this location and it is likely to have been the eastern boundary of the plot during the development of this area.

The earliest deposit visible in this trench was layer 20, a firm very dark brown grey clay silt with fragments of charcoal, stone and mortar. This layer was over 0.60m thick. Sealing this deposit was a layer of rough limestone and

clunch blocks (18), up to two courses thick (maximum thickness 0.50m) with coarse mortar between.

Sealing this foundation layer and probably representing backfilling after robbing of the stone wall (in foundation cut 23) was layer 17, a loose dark grey brown clay silt with large quantities of tile, stone, mortar post-medieval pottery, glass and brick.

At the southern end of the trench and extending for 4.70m northwards was a red brick wall (24), 1.10m deep with a chalk rubble foundation approximately 0.20m thick (25). The upper part of this wall had been disturbed by modern activity and was sealed by layer 19 (equivalent to layer 9 in Trench 2).

Cutting through layer 19 was a modern brick wall (22), 2.30m from the southern end of the trench and 0.66m deep, truncating the earlier red brick wall and extending westwards across Trench 3.

### 5.2.3 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 3.35m long, although the western end of the trench was not excavated to allow access to the rear of 5 Thompson's Lane. At the eastern end of the trench was a continuation of the extant brick wall which forms the property boundary to the east and parts of this were left *in situ* in the foundation trench. The wall that forms the north-eastern boundary of the site was visible extending eastward and westwards along the north-facing section of Trench 4 for 1.60m. Beyond this was a heavily root disturbed garden type soil with brick and tile and modern pottery fragments.

At the western end of Trench 4 another post-medieval brick foundation was visible. It was parallel to that at the eastern end and of a similar brick and mortar construction. A deposit of sand (0.30m wide and 0.45m deep separated this foundation with a modern yellow brick foundation which crossed the trench and was visible in both sections. The wall stub was sealed by the same dark silty clay garden-type soil equivalent to deposit 17 in Trench 3.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The archaeology revealed in the evaluation trench consisted mostly of undisturbed, horizontally stratified layers. A single sherd of Samian pottery in the earliest deposit suggests a Roman date, although this may be residual given the limited sample size and the occurrence of Roman pottery in overlying medieval deposits. It was also the only deposit to contain snail shells, the significance of which is not clear at this stage.

The overlying deposit contained over 100 sherds of pottery, mostly medieval, with up to a dozen fabric types present. It is typical of a low status urban

assemblage with evidence for trading links with neighbouring counties, but with no foreign imports. The finds assemblage included kitchen and decorated table wares (1200-1350), animal bones and oyster shells. This deposit clearly represents the dumping of domestic waste from nearby occupation, at a time when it was common practice to dump rubbish close to dwellings.

Above this rubbish layer was a paler and comparatively clean deposit containing pottery with a slightly later date range, extended to approximately AD1500. This may indicate the raising up of the later medieval ground surface for some reason or may reflect the more organised disposal of rubbish that occurred in many larger centres of population at this time. One fragment of copper working slag was found in this layer, indicating nearby craft working. Confirmation of this would require further work, and the proposed development scheme is too limited for meaningful investigation.

Above the cleaner layer were two further dark layers containing late medieval and post-medieval pottery and a fragment of clay pipe stem. These probably represent very late medieval or post-medieval garden/cultivation soils that were cut by a relatively modern posthole.

The foundation trench revealed a range of post-medieval wall foundations which indicate that the property boundary has remained constant in recent centuries. The undisturbed deposits in the middle of the plot confirm this interpretation.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The evaluation and monitoring was successful in achieving the objectives of establishing the character, date, state of preservation and extent of archaeological remains. Archaeological deposits dating from the medieval period, or earlier, clearly survive in a relatively undisturbed state in the middle of the plot and should remain so when the extension is built over them. Limited post-medieval truncation had occurred and this was confined to the upper layers and around the plot boundary where post-medieval features and finds were present. The archaeological deposits in the middle of the site are demonstrably at least 1.40m thick and contained finds indicating the urban character of the site from the early post-medieval period and suggesting preservation of deposits at greater depths.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank E & P Building Design who commissioned the work on behalf of the National Spiritualist Church who funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts. Carole Fletcher identified the pottery and provided the spot dating. Emily Oakes produced the illustrations.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec of the County Archaeology Office, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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Taylor, A., 1999, *Cambridge The Hidden History* (Tempus)

Other sources consulted are the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Records and the Urban Archaeological Database, together with archives and material held by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit.



**Appendix 1: Pottery Spot Dates by Carole Fletcher**

Context No	Fabric Types	Spot Date
4	Stamford, Essex Red Ware	1550+
5	Thetford, Essex Red Ware, Roman (1 sherd)	1500-1800
6	Grimston, Medieval Ely, Essex Micaceous Coarse Ware, St Neots, Sible Hedingham Fine Ware, Roman (3 sherds)	1200-1500
7	Medieval Ely, Lyveden Stanion, Sible Hedingham, Brill-Boarstall, Developed Stamford, Northants Shelly Ware, Essex Grey Ware, Mill Green Coarse Ware, Thetford, Fen Sandy Ware, Grimston, St Neots, Roman (2 sherds).	1200-1350
8	Samian	Roman
10	Medieval Ely ware, Sible Hedingham, Colchester, Essex Grey Ware and Metropolitan Slip Ware	early post-medieval
11	Shelly ware	1150-1350
14	Grimston and Essex Grey Ware	1200-1400

**Appendix 2: Context and Finds List**

Context No.	Context type	Number of fragments					
		Pottery	Brick/Tile	Animal Bone	Clay	Oyster Shell	Other
1	modern layer						
2	posthole fill						
3	posthole cut						
4	layer	3	3	4	1		
5	layer	4					
6	layer	16		4		3	Copper alloy slag
7	layer	103		31		16	Copper alloy object
8	layer	1					
9	layer						
10	layer	8	2	2			
11	layer	1	1			1	
12	layer						
13	cut						
14	fill	2				1	
15	cut						
16	deposit						
17	deposit						
18	foundation						
19	deposit						
20	layer						
21	layer						
22	brick wall						
23	foundation cut						
24	brick wall						
25	foundation layer						
26	layer						



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