

# Church Green War Memorial, Ramsey Archaeological Monitoring Report

**March 2022** 

**Client: Ramsey Town Council** 

Issue No: 1

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NGR: TL 2905 8519





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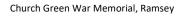


## Church Green War Memorial, Ramsey Archaeological Watching Brief Report

# Written by Anne-Laure Bollen MA PCIfA With illustrations by Danielle Hall.

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#### **Summary**

Between the 15th and 23rd of February 2022 Oxford Archaeology East carried out archaeological monitoring at the Church Green War Memorial in Ramsey, Cambridgeshire.

The work entailed monitoring on all works relating to the ground disturbance around the memorial, specifically the removal of the existing concrete foundation. Due to the depth of the existing footing no archaeological features or finds were revealed by the works.



### **Acknowledgements**

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Amanda Jerrom of Ramsey Town Council for commissioning this project and Jordan Mills of A.J. Mills Stone Masons for facilitating the works. Kerry Hopper wrote the Brief for the archaeological works.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Gareth Rees. The fieldwork was directed by Anne-Laure Bollen. Survey and digitising were carried out by Gareth Rees and Danielle Hall.



#### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology East (OA East) was commissioned by Ramsey Town Council to undertake a watching brief at the site of Church Green War Memorial, Ramsey (TL 2905 8519; Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken in response to a Planning Application (Ref. 20/01311/LBC). A brief was set by Kerry Hopper of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) outlining the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. A written scheme of investigation was produced by OA East (Rees 2021b) detailing the methods by which OA proposed to meet the requirements of the brief.

#### 1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 Ramsey lies on March gravels (British Geological Survey 1995), at a height of c. 6m OD, on what was effectively an island surrounded by Bury Fen to the south and Stocking Fen to the north. Historically it was approached, as the chroniclers note, by a causeway on one side. The line of the streets has changed little since originally laid out (Page *et al* 1932, 188–9).
- 1.2.2 The memorial is sited in Church Green which is a public green in the town, surrounded by roads.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background (Fig. 2)

1.3.1 This section focuses on the Late Saxon and medieval periods, as these relate to the Abbey whose boundary lay c.50m to the south of the site (see Fig. 2), and the formation of the current town of Ramsey. The background draws on that presented by Rees (2021a) and research undertaken by Spoerry and colleagues (2008) but also includes details of more recent work not included in previous texts.

#### **Historical Sources**

- 1.3.2 The historic town of Ramsey owes its existence to the Benedictine Abbey created by Oswald, bishop of Worcester from AD960, and Aethelwine, the aeldorman of East Anglia. At Oswald's suggestion, Aethelwine founded a small wooden chapel for three hermits, reputedly after a vision of St Benedict appeared to his fisherman in Ramsey Mere (DeWindt and DeWindt 2006, 11). Oswald's investment in the site continued with the construction of a stone church and other buildings, which began in AD969 (DeWindt and DeWindt 2006, 11). A series of substantial endowments made the house, one of the richest in the fens 'Ramsey the Golden'.
- 1.3.3 During Stephen's reign, the house suffered severely and was overtaken by Geoffrey de Mandeville in 1143 he fortified the house and expelled the monks (Page et al. 1932, 191). The Abbey was badly damaged and impoverished. The Abbey was dissolved in 1539, when the Cromwell family bought its land, titles and buildings and saw to its destruction.

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#### Archaeological Background

#### Monastic Buildings

- 1.3.4 The exact location of the monastic buildings, including the cloisters, Abbey church and inner/outer court boundaries is not known, due largely to the scale of the destruction after the Dissolution. Various theories have been put forward (e.g. Dickinson 1967, 245-7; Baggs, as cited in Spoerry *et al* 2008) based upon the interpretation of the surviving buildings, including the present day parish church of St Thomas à Becket (built in 1180-90 and thought to have originated either as the original infirmary, or the guest house/hospital); the 16th-century gate house; a 13th-century chapel/infirmary building incorporated into the cellars of the present Abbey House; and surviving boundary walls. However, Spoerry *et al* (2008, 177) postulated a probable layout based on all available evidence at the time, which suggests that the north wall of the Abbey church ran along the extant southern wall of the church yard of St Thomas à Becket. They concluded that the infirmary was in fact more likely to have been the surviving 13th century structure in the basement of the Abbey House often referred to as the 'Lady Chapel', whilst the current parish church's origins were as a gatehouse.
- 1.3.5 In 2012 Oxford Archaeology commissioned a geophysical survey and carried out test pit excavations within the scheduled area of the Abbey to test the previous hypothesis (Gilmour 2012). The geophysical survey revealed several linear high resistance anomalies orientated west-south-west to east-north-east to the south of the Abbey House. Significantly, the presence of semi-circular or apsidal anomaly under the lawn to the east of the Abbey House which Masters interprets as a possible chantry chapel on the north side of the Abbey church (cited in Gilmour 2012, 6).

#### **Precinct Boundary**

The War Memorial lies within the projected course of the precinct boundary. The 1.3.6 Abbey church and cloister were located in a large precinct surrounded at least for part of its course by a ditch, and probably also a bank, forming a large sub-oval enclosure. For the majority of its predicted course the boundary follows the 4-5m contour (Mortimer 2006, 17). It would only have passed over ground above 5.50m at its eastern edge where its course has so far not been identified. The RCHME recorded the most obvious earthworks within the Abbey environs (RCHME 1926, 210) and it is these which provide some evidence for the northern part of the enclosure. The northeastern corner being formed by a series of 'pits' or 'ponds' (Spoerry et al 2008, 179). The enclosure continued south-west as a channel (labelled as 'lode' on Fig. 2) before curving around across the High Street; a course which can be seen fossilised in existing property boundaries (ibid, 180). The course south from here may have run along earthworks preserved just below the 3m contour (ibid.), however an alternative route along Hollow Way would re-join the 5m contour and meet up with the earthworks of Booth's Hill, a supposed Anarchy period castle. Excavations in 2004 (Cooper 2005) and 2006 (Mortimer 2006) uncovered a large ditch thought to be the most easterly known extent of the boundary which must have curved up north from Hollow Lane at its most southerly point. Mortimer also identified a possible trackway leading around the outside of the enclosure at this point, visible on aerial photographs. Mortimer's excavation also uncovered a series of north-to-south orientated boundary ditches



thought to date from the medieval to the post-medieval periods, although dating was inconclusive the alignment was still preserved in boundaries shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map.

1.3.7 Larger scale excavations have taken place within the precinct. Oxford Archaeology carried out excavations in 1998 and 2002 before the development of a new school building 96m to the north-east of the Abbey House (Atkins *et al* 2008). Further excavations were carried out in the grounds of the Abbey School between 2018 and 2020 and have uncovered further evidence of the precinct boundary (Abrehart forthcoming; Rees 2021a).

#### Extra-mural archaeological works

1.3.8 Previous archaeological work conducted elsewhere in Ramsey has tended to occur to the north-west of the Abbey (these sites are not illustrated on Fig. 2). Excavations at 52 High Street found Saxo-Norman occupation evidence (Nicolson 2006), while remains of high medieval activity located on several sites demonstrates the levelling and reclamation of wet, low-lying areas (Atkins 2004a and 2004b; Cooper 2003 and 2005; Hickling 2006; O'Brien and Crank 2002; Membery and Hatton 1996; Pearson and McDonald 2000; Webb 2015). Remains of structures lie above some of these levelling layers (e.g. Atkins 2004b); archaeological work demonstrates repeated flooding and late peat formation with resultant problems for settlement. Further ground levelling occurred in the post-medieval period (Atkins 2004a; Jackson 2016). Part of the medieval Little Whyte lode channel, with post-medieval levelling deposits was uncovered by an evaluation at 102 High Street to the north-west of the Abbey (Webster 2015).

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#### 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

#### **2.1** Aims

- 2.1.1 The project aims were as follows:
  - i. To investigate and record archaeological features or deposits encountered during ground works.
  - ii. To metal detect both the excavated areas and spoil heaps to aid recovery of metal objects.

#### 2.2 Research frameworks

2.2.1 This watching brief took place within the context of, and aimed to contribute to, the goals of the Regional Research Framework for the East of England (https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/resource-assessments/).

#### 2.3 Methodology

- 2.3.1 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation (2014a) and local and national planning policies.
- 2.3.2 Archaeological monitoring was undertaken in one trench which was excavated under the supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist. Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector.
- 2.3.3 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's pro-forma sheets. Plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Digital photographs were taken of all features and deposits.



#### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.1.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform. The natural geology was not reached in the trench monitored and no subsoil was noted. Only a dark brown grey sandy silt topsoil was observed. The location of the trench is shown on Fig. 1. A selection of photographs illustrating the deposit sequence is also included (Plates 2 and 3).
- 3.1.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. However, no archaeological features have been identified as the concrete was still present at a depth of 0.70m and no further excavation was necessary.

#### 3.2 Results

- 3.2.1 One trench was monitored for the removal of the existing foundation of the war memorial. It consisted of a square area measuring 2.5m by 2.5m which was drilled to a depth of 0.70m on its southern part and to 0.4m for the rest of the trench (Plate 1). The initial plan to excavate new footings to a depth of 0.70m was amended due to the unexpected depth of the original concrete, which exceeded 0.7m, and the site contractor (AJ Mills Stone Masons) decided to not dig deeper in the rest of the trench. The natural geological substrate was not reached as the presence of concrete was still observed at this depth and no finds were recovered.
- 3.2.2 A series of layers were exposed in the southern section of the trench after the removal of the concrete (Figure 3, Section 1; Plate 2). Three layers were observed beneath the 0.35m deep topsoil (1), consisting of mid yellow brown gravely sandy silts (2 and 4) which measured between 0.10m and 0.12m thick and a dark brown grey clayey silt (3) which measured 0.08m thick. No artefacts were recovered from these layers. These may have been levelling layers or possibly the upper backfill of a ditch as the trench was probably located in the course of an old lode channel which fed into the Abbey precinct boundary (see Section 1.3, above; Fig. 2). However, the public green where the war memorial has been erected is raised compared with the surrounding roads and it therefore seems unlikely that these layers represent backfills of a possible ditch, as the level reached by the works seem likely to have too high to uncover buried archaeological features. Instead, these layers may be more likely to relate to the levelling and building up of the ground in the area of the green.



#### 4 DISCUSSION

The watching brief revealed no archaeological features or finds. However, the limited size of the trench and the fact that the natural geology was not reached mean that these results cannot be regarded as an accurate representation of the archaeological potential of the site as a whole. Indeed, the war memorial lies in an area of very high archaeological potential, within 50m of the northern boundary of the designated area of the remains of Ramsey Abbey, a scheduled monument and adjacent to the medieval cemetery of St Thomas Beckets Church (MCB17092; Fig. 2). Also, archaeological remains of contemporary date are well documented from previous investigations in the vicinity, to the east, north and west of the application area in addition to within the scheduled area of the monument (e.g. CHER ref.'s MCB21084, CB15414 and MCB17875; Fig. 2). The levelling layers uncovered in this trench as well as the raised elevation of the ground of the park in general, may cast some doubt on the existence of the projected course of the lode in this area. However, the lodes and other large channels uncovered elsewhere (Abrehart forthcoming; Rees 2021a; Atkins et al. 2008) and were well backfilled filled with bank material and midden-like deposits, so the possibility remains that the channel in this area was backfilled and then raised to mitigate for slumping of these fills in later years.



#### 5 ARCHIVING

5.1.1 Since no significant finds or records were made during the monitoring this report effectively forms the site archive. See Appendix C and Appendix E, 'Archival Plates'.

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#### APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1, War Memorial						
General o	descriptio	n			Orientation	E-W
Trench de	evoid of a	rchaeolog	gy. Consis	ts of topsoil overlying leveling	Length (m)	2.5
layers. Na	atural not	reached.			Width (m)	2.5
				Avg. depth (m)	0.72	
Context	Type	Width	Depth	Description	Finds	Date
No.		(m)	(m)			
1	Layer	-	0.35	Topsoil		
2	Layer	-	0.10	Levelling layer		
3	Layer	-	0.08	Levelling layer		
4	Layer	-	0.12	Levelling layer		



#### **APPENDIX B**

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#### APPENDIX C ARCHIVES

#### Paper

5.1.6 This report is the entirety of the paper archive for this site.

#### Digital

5.1.7 The digital archive consists of digital photos, report figures\illustrations, a GIS project, text and digital versions of this report.

Туре	Format	No. of files	Size (MB)
Report (text)	.docx	1	5
Report (figures)	.pdf\.ai	1	9
Image	.jpg\.NEF	11\11	438
GIS	Shapefiles	10 (2 shapefiles)	.002

Table 1. Contents of digital archive

Image no	Subject	Scale	View	Date	Photographer
DSC_0001	General view of war memorial area		W	15/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0003	General view of war memorial area		SW	15/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0005	Section showing depth of trench	1m	S	23/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0007	Section showing depth of trench	1m;0.5m	S	23/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0008	Section showing depth of trench	1m;0.5m	S	23/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0010	View of trench	1m	N	23/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0011	View of trench	1m	S	23/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen
DSC_0013	View of trench	1m	S	23/02/22	Anne-Laure Bollen

Table 2. Archive images (reproduced below, Appendix E).

#### **Deposition**

5.1.8 The digital archive will be deposited with the A.D.S in due course.



AP	P	E١	ND	IX	
D			_		:1.

### **SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM**

Planning App. No.

Project	Details
---------	---------

Site Code

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-505069				
Project Name	Church Green War Memorial, Ramsey				
Start of Fieldwork	15/02/22	End of Fieldwork	23/02/22		
Previous Work	None	Future Work	No		
roject Reference Codes					

HER Number	ECB 6843		Related Numbers	
Prompt		NPPF		
Development Type Memori		Memorial monume	nt	
Place in Planning Process Af		After full determination (eg. As a condition)		

#### Techniques used (tick all that apply)

RASWAR21

confidence asea (tiek an that apply)						
	Aerial Photography –		Grab-sampling		Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	
	interpretation					
	Aerial Photography - new		Gravity-core		Sample Trenches	
	Annotated Sketch		Laser Scanning		Survey/Recording of	
					Fabric/Structure	
	Augering		Measured Survey		Targeted Trenches	
	Dendrochonological Survey		Metal Detectors		Test Pits	
	Documentary Search		Phosphate Survey		Topographic Survey	
	Environmental Sampling		Photogrammetric Survey		Vibro-core	
	Fieldwalking		Photographic Survey		Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)	
	Geophysical Survey		Rectified Photography	$\boxtimes$	Watching Brief	

#### **Period** Monument

Choose an item.
Choose an item.
Choose an item.

Object	Period
--------	--------

none	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.

20/01311/LBC

Insert more lines as appropriate.

#### **Project Location**

Cambridgeshire	Address (including Postcode)
Huntingdon	Church Green
Ramsey	Ramsey
Cambridge	PE26 1DW
6m2	
TL 2905 8519	
	Huntingdon Ramsey Cambridge 6m2

#### **Project Originators**

.,				
Organisation	Oxford Archaeology East			
Project Brief Originator	Kerry Hopper			
Project Design Originator	Gareth Rees			
Project Manager	Gareth Rees			
Project Supervisor	Anne-Laure Bollen			



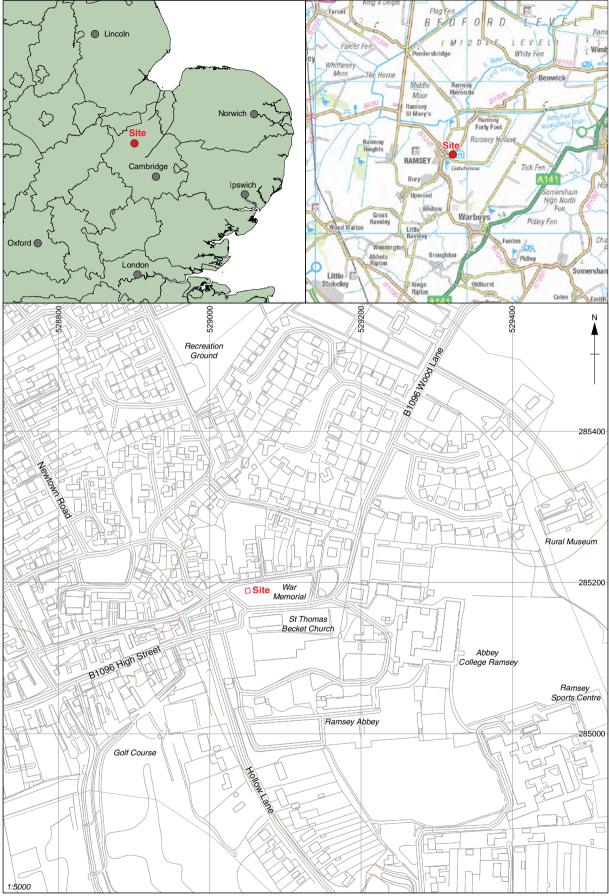
#### **Project Archives**

Physical Archive (Finds) Digital Archive Paper Archive

Location	ID
n/a	n/a
OA East\ ADS	ECB6843
ccc	ECB6843

Physical Contents	Present?	Digital files associated with Finds	Paperwork associated w	vith
Animal Bones Ceramics Environmental Glass Human Remains Industrial Leather Metal Stratigraphic Survey Textiles Wood Worked Bone Worked Stone/Lithic None				
Other				
Digital Media Database GIS Geophysics Images (Digital photos) Illustrations (Figures/Plate Moving Image Spreadsheets Survey Text Virtual Reality	tes)	Paper Media Aerial Photos Context Sheets Correspondence Diary Drawing Manuscript Map Matrices Microfiche Miscellaneous Research/Notes Photos (negatives/prints) Plans Report Sections Survey	s/slides)	





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Figure 1: Site location showing development area (red)





Figure 2: HER records in the vicinity of the site

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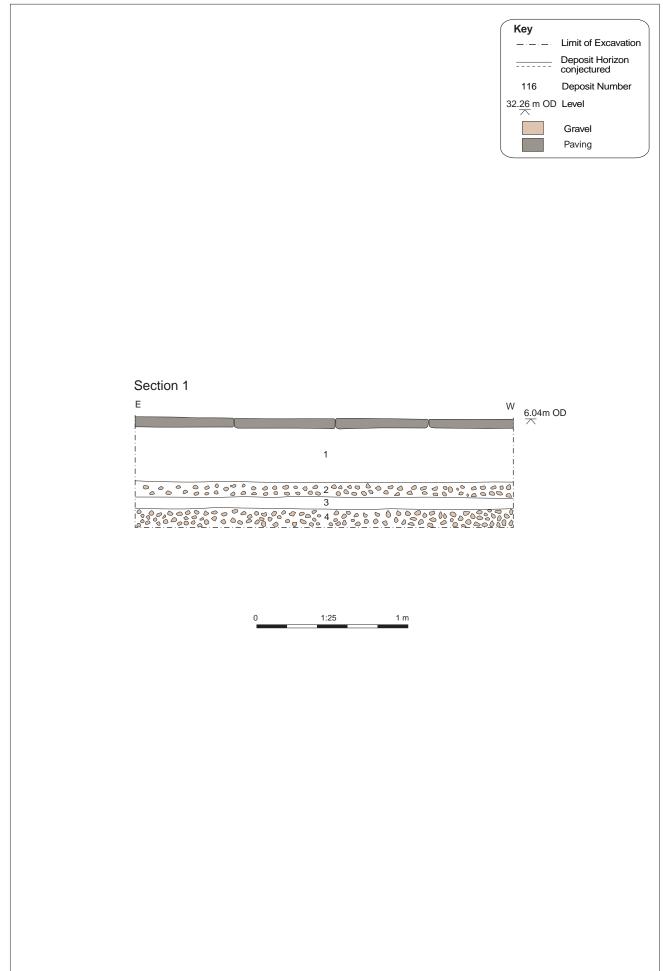


Figure 3: Selected section

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Plate 1: Drilling work in progress, from the northwest



Plate 2: Section 1 showing possible leveling layers, from the north

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Plate 3: Trench after work done by AJ Mills Stones Masons, from the west

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DSC\_0007



DSC\_0001



DSC\_0005

**APPENDIX E: Archive Plates** 







DSC\_0013



DSC\_0008



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