

# Church of St Mary, Sawston, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Monitoring



Len Middleton



**CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

## **Archaeological Monitoring**

# **Church of St. Mary, Sawston, Cambridgeshire**

**Len Middleton**

**May 2025**

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Location:	TL 48757 49227
Site Code:	ECB7536
Event Number:	ECB7536
Report no.	1634

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## PROJECT DATA

Site name	Church of St. Mary, Sawston, Cambridgeshire
OS Grid Ref.	TL 48757 49227
Client	Church of St. Mary, Sawston
Consultant	Ashley Courtney Architect
Planning ref.	N/A
Brief issued by	Dr. Tim Reynolds
Event number	ECB7536
Physical archive	Church of St. Mary, Sawston
Digital archive	Apollo Repository, University of Cambridge
OASIS no.	cambridg3-533802
CAU Site code	ECB7536
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## SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring of drainage works was undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) from the 13th to the 17th February 2025 in the cemetery of the Church of St. Mary, Sawston, Cambridgeshire. The Parish Church Council proposed to rework the existing water drainage for the south side of the church. This involved the digging of two new soakaways, associated catch pits and drainage runs. Both articulated human remains and archaeological deposits were likely to be encountered. Archaeological monitoring was therefore required.

Two soakaways, one 2.4m x 1.30m at 1.05m depth (Soakaway 1), and another 2.4m x 1.30m at 1.02m depth (Soakaway 2), were excavated on the south side of the church to make room for the placement of drainage works.

The investigations revealed a homogenous sequence of cemetery soils, filled with occasional disarticulated human remains and assorted debris such as bricks or pottery. Two burials within grave cuts were partially exposed at the base of in Soakaway 2. The lower half of a skeleton and fragments of coffin material were recorded. The material culture retrieved from the sequence likely dates from the Post-Medieval period.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The drainage works were undertaken by the Parish Church Council and overseen by Ashley Courtney Architect. We are grateful to the Church of St Mary and Spectrum Stone Ltd for their friendly help and interest during the works.

The Written Brief was prepared by Dr Tim Reynolds, Diocesan Archaeologist. The CAU is grateful for their advice and interest throughout the project.

The Project Manager was Ricky Patten, and the monitoring was undertaken by Len Middleton. Project administration and logistics was provided by Samantha Smith, Claudia Miranda Rodrigues and Fabrizio Canu. Photography was taken by Len Middleton with Graphics prepared Bryan Crossan. The Survey data was taken by Len Middleton and processed by Jane Matthews.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Project background**

- 1.1.1 The Church of St Mary is located in Church Lane, in the centre of Sawston, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1). The building is Grade I Listed (1128065). The area of investigation lies to the south of the church, and consisted of two adjacent drainage systems extending at 90 degrees to the church.
- 1.1.2 The areas encompass grave plots bounded by brick and flint walls to the north, south and west with the church itself is located to the north, adjacent to the road. Both the church and cemetery are still in use, however the grave plots surrounding the church itself date to the 19th century and earlier with more recent graves located at the east end of the cemetery.
- 1.1.3 A planning condition was placed on the development by the Diocese of Ely requiring archaeological monitoring of the site. A Written Brief outlining the archaeological requirements was issued by Dr Tim Reynolds, Diocesan Archaeologist (2024).

### **1.2 Geology and topography**

- 1.2.1 The bedrock comprises Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation. (British Geological Survey website, <https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/> ; accessed 5 march 2025).
- 1.2.2 The area of investigation lies at c. 25m AOD.
- 1.2.3 With possible origins dating to the Early Medieval period, the current church has stood in the centre of Sawston since at least the 11th century.

## **2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Previous investigations in the Development Area**

- 2.1.1 The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Records (CHER) lists no investigations which have taken place within the footprint of the soakaways, catch pits and drainage runs, likely due to the area being a long-standing church and cemetery with most activity limited to grave digging, landscaping and phases of rebuilding and refurbishment of the church.

### **2.2 Investigations in the wider area**

#### ***Prehistory***

- 2.2.1 Evidence of prehistoric activity is recorded from the Neolithic with flint scatters, including cores blades and scrapers (CHER MCB17619, MCB04109) found nearby as well as a flint axe (CHER MCB04113), indicating flint tools may have been being produced in the vicinity.
- 2.2.2 Bronze Age enclosures have been identified on Lynton Way (CHER MCB16829) and Cambridge Road (CHER MCB17152), to the northeast and north of the development area, which suggests the area may have become settled during this period.
- 2.2.3 A trackway of possible Iron Age origin was identified during excavations to the east of Icknield Primary School, c. 700m to the northeast of the development area (CHER MCB30520).

#### ***Roman***

- 2.2.4 The trackway of Iron Age origin identified at excavations to the east of the Icknield Primary school (CHER MCB30520) carried on in use throughout the Roman period. Further Roman features, including Roman enclosure ditches, have been identified to the east of Huddlestone Road (CHER MCB28986) and Roman ditches, a water channel and a well have been excavated at Sawston Hall (CHER MCB17295), immediately to the south of St Mary's church. The ditches relating to a possible Roman road have also been excavated at the site of Sawston Police Station (CHER CB15777), to the northwest of the development area.

#### ***Anglo-Saxon***

- 2.2.5 Excavations at Sawston Hall (CHER MCB17810) revealed ditches and pits of a Middle to Late Saxon date. Associated finds included pottery, animal bone, quern stones, slag and a brooch. An additional Saxon brooch was reported to have been found within a kilometre of the PDA (CHER MCB04112).

#### ***Medieval***

- 2.2.6 The Church of St Mary Sawston (CHER 04123) dates to at least the 12th century, with the chancel being the most intact original feature of the building. Rebuilding of elements of both the chancel and the tower took place in the 13th and 14th centuries.
- 2.2.7 Earthwork remains of rectangular medieval moat have been identified in Dale's Grove (NHER 00165), thought to be the site of the Manor of Dale.

#### ***Post-Medieval and Modern***

- 2.2.8 Sawston Hall (CHER 01267a) is a 16th-century mansion with some pre 1553 work, built round a rectangular courtyard (the southern half about 1557, the northern half about 1584). The manor



was originally medieval and was rebuilt and restored several times. It has important associations with Mary Tudor and is the only Elizabethan Mansion in the country which is built of clunch and not brick. The manor is located within large formal and informal gardens.

- 2.2.9 A late 17th-dovecote is located at the John Faulkner Primary School on Mill Lane (CHER 10450) and is currently in use as a store shed by the school.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1.1 The archaeological work was carried out in accordance to an archaeological watching brief prepared by the Diocesan Archaeologist (Dr Tim Reynolds 2024) and approved by the Parochial Church Council prior to commencement of the works. The monitoring was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Monitoring and recording (CIFA 2023) and Code of Conduct (2014).
- 3.1.2 Monitoring was undertaken between the 13th and 17th February 2025.
- 3.1.3 The excavations were undertaken by the contractor by hand or using a tracked 360 mini-excavator under archaeological supervision.
- 3.1.4 The deposits encountered during the monitoring were recorded using the CAU recording system and located via a Leica GPS system.
- 3.1.5 Photographs were taken of all features using a high resolution digital camera and sections were hand-drawn at an appropriate scale (either 1:10 or 1:20).

## 4. RESULTS

- 4.1.1 The soakaways, catch pits and drainage runs were located on the southern side of the church, extending at 90 degrees away from the building (Fig. 2). They had gravestones immediately to their east and west, and a vaulted chest tomb was located in between soakaway 1 and soakaway 2.

### 4.2 Catch Pit 1

Figures 2-3

- 4.2.1 Catch Pit 1 measured 1.3m x 1.2m, and was dug to a depth of 1.07m. It was located in the north-east of the development area, to the west of a row of headstones and to the north of Soakaway 1. During excavation several pieces of disarticulated human remains and various elements of debris including bricks and pottery sherds were discovered. The human remains were retrieved and separated from the other artefacts for reburial.

Depth (m)	Deposit		Material Culture
1.07	Cemetery Soil	Brown sandy silt with occasional disarticulated human remains (BN), fragments of ceramic construction material such as bricks (CBM) and pottery, small rounded-sub-angular gravels and frequent rooting.	PT (Post-Med), CBM (Post-Med),

Table 2: Catch Pit 1

### 4.3 Catch Pit 2

Figures 2-3

- 4.3.1 Catch Pit 2 measured 1.3m x 1.2m, and was 1.03m deep. It was located in the north-west of the development area, to the east of a row of headstones and to the north of Soakaway 2. During excavation several pieces of disarticulated human remains and various elements of debris including bricks and pottery sherds were discovered. The human remains were stored separately for reburial.

Depth (m)	Deposit		Material Culture
1.03	Cemetery Soil	Brown sandy silt with frequent disarticulated human remains (BN), fragments of bricks (CBM), pottery (PT), small rounded-sub-angular gravels and frequent rooting.	PT (Post-Med), CBM (Post-Med),

Table 4: Catch Pit 2

### 4.4 Soakaway 1

Figures 2-4

- 4.4.1 Soakaway 1 measured 1.3m x 2.4m and was 1.05m deep. It was located in the south-east of the development area, between a row of headstones and a chest tomb. During excavation several

pieces of disarticulated human remains and various elements of debris including bricks and pottery sherds were discovered. The human remains were stored separately for reburial. Layers of concrete, CBM and tile/ceramic drain, that were possibly the remains of an earlier soakaway, were uncovered.

Depth (m)	Deposit		Material Culture
1.05	Cemetery Soil	Brown sandy silt with occasional disarticulated human remains (BN), fragments of bricks and tile (CBM), pottery (PT), concrete, small rounded & sub-angular gravels and frequent rooting.	PT (Post-Med), CBM (Post-Med), Concrete (Modern)

Table 1: Soakaway 1

#### 4.5 Soakaway 2

Figures 2-4

- 4.5.1 Soakaway 2 measured 1.3m x 2.4m and 1.02m deep. It was located in the south-west of the excavation area, to the east of a row of headstones and to west of a chest tomb. During excavation several pieces of disarticulated human remains and various elements of debris including bricks, and pottery sherds were discovered, with the human remains separated for reburial. The cuts of two burials containing articulated human remains were exposed at the base of the soakaway. The exposed human remains were cleaned, photographed and were then left *in situ*, being re-buried under a layer of soil.

Depth (m)	Deposit		Material Culture
1.02	Cemetery Soil	Brown sandy silt with frequent disarticulated human remains and two articulated human burials (BN), fragments of bricks (CBM), pottery (PT), small rounded-sub-angular gravels and frequent rooting.	PT (Post-Med), CBM (Post-Med)

Table 3: Soakaway 2

## **5. DISCUSSION**

- 5.1.1 Works on the soakaways, catchpits and drainage runs revealed a layer of homogenous soil up to a meter deep that contained large amounts of disarticulated human remains, showing the continuous use of the churchyard.
- 5.1.2 The frequent fragments of Post-Medieval pottery and CBM observed during the investigations show the repeated disturbance of the ground and older graves during the period. Soakaway 2 in particular showed evidence of the construction of an earlier Post-Medieval or modern soakaway meaning that burials were not only disturbed by subsequent ones being reinterred but also by construction and remedial works to the church.
- 5.1.3 This may also suggest that earlier parts of the sequence were not reached, with medieval deposits potentially preserved under the base level of the groundworks.
- 5.1.4 At the base of soakaway were two articulated adult human burials in grave cuts that aligned east to west. Both were extended straight in a supine position with the head to the west and the feet to the east.

## **6. SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1.1 The monitoring of drainage works at the Church of St Mary allowed for the recording and preservation of two interred individuals *in situ*. Alongside this were the remains of multiple disarticulated individuals discovered in all of the soakaways and catch pits attesting to the continuous use of this area of the cemetery for burials.

## 7. REFERENCES

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## **8. APPENDIX 1: ARCHIVE**

8.1.1 The archive is currently held in the CAU's Cambridge facilities.

### **8.2 Standards**

8.2.1 The project archive will be prepared and deposited in line with the MoRPHE guidelines (Historic England 2006, reissued 2015), ClfA Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (2014, updated 2020), the ClfA Standard and guidance for archaeological monitoring and recording (2023), the United Kingdom Institute for Conservators Conservation Guidelines No. 2 (2012).

### **8.3 Archive, discard, and transfer of title agreement**

8.3.1 There was no physical archive.

8.3.2 The digital archaeological archive will be deposited with the University of Cambridge Apollo Repository, a CoreTrustSeal accredited repository.



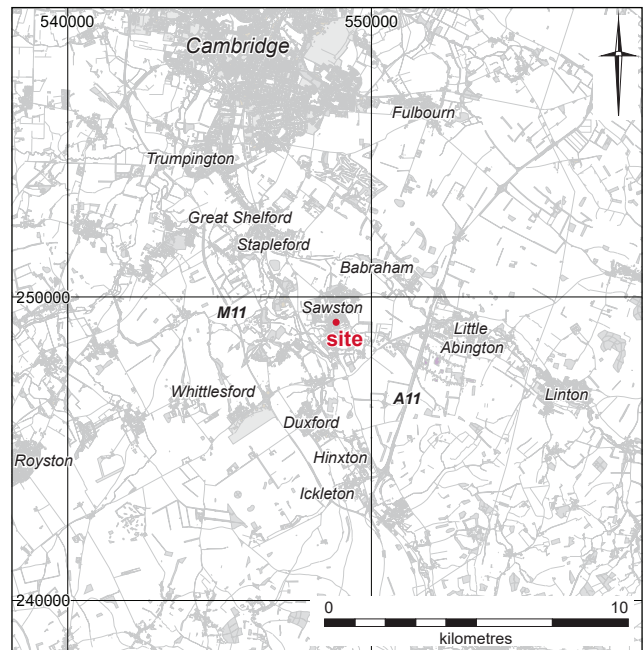
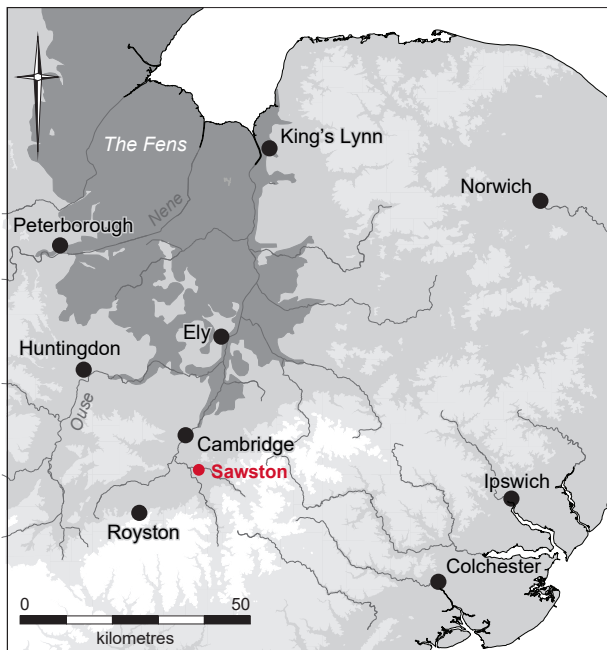


Figure 1. Location plan

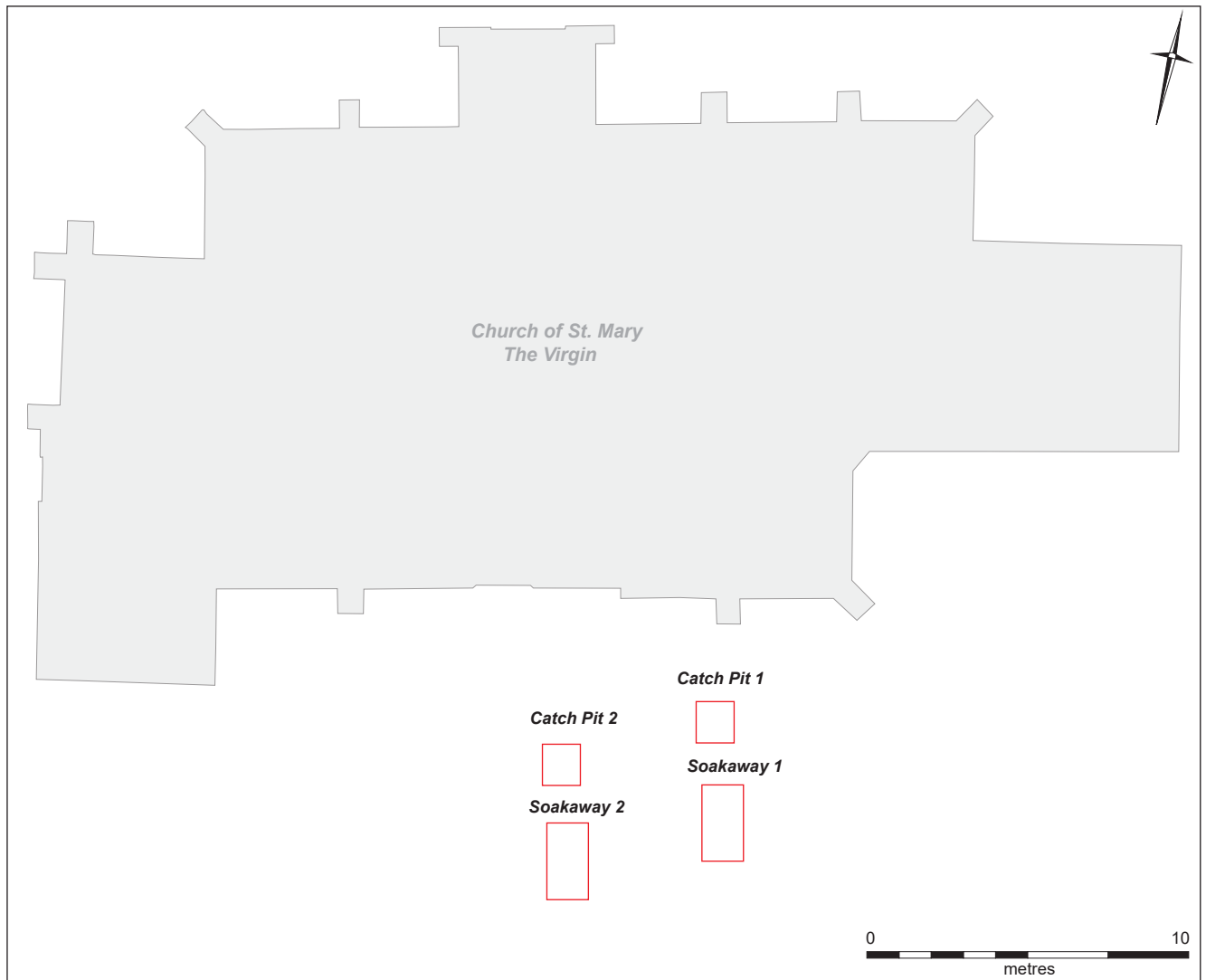


Figure 2. Location of Catch Pits (1-2) and Soakaways (1-2) in relation to the Church of St. Mary The Virgin, Sawston



Figure 3. Catch Pit 1 (top) and Catch Pit 2 in section (bottom)





Figure 4. Soakaway 1 (top) and Soakaway 2 in section (bottom) with grave cuts visible at the base of the soakaway

# OASIS Summary for cambridg3-533802

OASIS ID (UID)	cambridg3-533802
Project Name	Field Observation (monitoring) at Church of St. Mary, Sawston
Sitename	Church of St. Mary, Sawston
Sitecode	ECB7536
Project Identifier(s)	ECB7536
Activity type	Field Observation (monitoring)
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Ecclesiastical consent
Organisation Responsible for work	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project Dates	13-Feb-2025 - 17-Feb-2025
Location	Church of St. Mary, Sawston NGR : TL 48757 49227 LL : 52.1213474309602, 0.171401106301224 12 Fig : 548757,249227
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Cambridgeshire Local Authority District : South Cambridgeshire Parish : Sawston
Project Methodology	<p>The archaeological work was carried out in accordance to an archaeological watching brief prepared by the Diocesan Archaeologist (Dr Tim Reynolds 2024) approved by the Parochial Church Council prior to commencement of works. The excavation was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation (CIFA 2014, updated 2020) and Code of Conduct (2014).</p> <p>Monitoring was undertaken between the 13th and 17th February 2025. All works were excavated by a 360 mini-excavator and by hand and were watched by an archaeologist who attended to investigate the presence of any burials before drainage works could begin within the excavations.</p> <p>The deposits encountered during the monitoring were recorded using the CAU recording system and located via a Leica GPS system. Photographs were taken of all features using a high resolution digital camera and sections were hand-drawn at an appropriate scale (either 1:10 or 1:20).</p>

Project Results	<p>Archaeological monitoring of drainage works was undertaken by the CAU from the 13th to the 17th February 2025 in the cemetery of the Church of St. Mary, Sawston, Cambridgeshire. The Church proposed to rework the existing water drainage for the south side of the church. This involved the digging of two new soakaways, associated catch pits and drainage runs. These works will remove all sediment extant within each new pit and may encounter both articulated human remains and archaeological deposits. An archaeological watching brief was therefore required.</p> <p>Two soakaways, one 2.4m x 1.30m at 1.05m depth (Soakaway 1 ) and another 2.4x1.30m at 1.02m depth (Soakaway 2) were excavated on the south side of the church to make room for the placement of drainage works.</p> <p>The investigations revealed a homogenous sequence of cemetery soils, filled with occasional disarticulated human remains and assorted debris: bricks, pottery etc. Two burials within grave cuts were encountered in Soakaway 2 at a depth of 1.02m, composed of the lower half of a skeleton and fragments of coffin material. The material culture found within the sequences likely dates from the post- medieval era.</p>
Keywords	<p>Human Remains - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus</p> <p>Sherd - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus</p> <p>Ceramic - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus</p> <p>Soakaway - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types</p> <p>Inhumation - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types</p>
Funder	Town or parish council Church of St Mary, Sawston
HER	<p>Church Heritage Record (CHR) - unRev - STANDARD</p> <p>Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record - unRev - STANDARD</p>
Person Responsible for work	Ricky Patten
HER Identifiers	HER Event No - ECB7536
Archives	<p>Digital Archive - to be deposited with Cambridge University Archives; Accession Id(s): ECB7536</p> <p>Physical Archive, Documentary Archive - to be deposited with Church of England Record Centre; Accession Id(s): ECB7536</p>