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Andrew Townsend Architects

St Mary's Church, Little Coxwell, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 2265 0140

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

October 1999

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Prepared by: *John Dalt*

Date: *5/10/99*

Checked by: *Jan R. S. S. A.*

Date: *7/10/99*

Approved by: *R. Williams* HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date: *14/10/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In May 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Mary's Church, Little Coxwell, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 2265 0140). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal comprised the excavation of six trial holes to reveal the foundations of the church prior to the provision of new drainage works. An archaeological watching brief was required due to the potential for disturbance to archaeological deposits and/or human remains.

The watching brief was commissioned by Andrew Townsend Architects on behalf of the church. It was undertaken in consultation with the former DAC Archaeological Advisor, Mr David Miles.

2 Background (Fig. 1)

The earliest parts of the standing building date to the 12th-century. This was the Chapel of Ease built by the monks of Beaulieu Abbey, and the Chancel Arch, although this was substantially rebuilt in the 15th-century. The nave and the chancel are both Norman. From the outside the most striking part of the church is the 13th-century double bellcote; inside are a 15th-century octagonal font and a carved wooden rail screening the organ loft. It is thought likely that the rail is a part of the pre-Reformation rood screen, known to have existed in the church.

In the vicinity is an Iron Age hillfort, located on Furze Hill. This feature has been badly damaged by ploughing, and only the ramparts on the western side survive, and comprise a double bank and ditch.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; all excavation was by hand.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Fig. 2)

Test Pit 1.

Test Pit 1 measured 0.97 m east-west by 0.80 m north-south and was 0.93 m deep. The church foundations were exposed to the full depth of the pit, and comprised regular coursed blocks of limestone, with a slight batter projecting 0.25 m out from perpendicular, to a depth of 0.55 m below the present ground surface. Below this point and to the base of the pit the foundation became quite ragged and consisted of large irregular blocks and much loose rubble, a large quantity of which was removed; this material projected toward the wall face by some 0.50 m. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – topsoil; 0.20 m of mid gray silty clay loam.
- (2) – subsoil/graveyard soil; 0.60 m dark gray silty clay loam with much loose limestone rubble.
- (3) – natural; 0.13 m mid brown/orange clay.

Test Pit 2.

Test Pit 2 measured 0.87 m east-west by 0.95 m north-south and was 0.75 m deep. The church foundations were exposed to the full depth of the pit, and were regular and presented a vertical face to their full depth. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – topsoil; 0.20 m of mid gray silty clay loam.
- (2) – subsoil/graveyard soil; 0.55 m dark gray silty clay loam, quite heavily rooted, and containing a lens of mid brown/orange clay as seen in the north section.

Natural (3) was not exposed here.

Test Pit 3.

Test Pit 3 measured 0.91 m east-west by 0.95 m north-south by 1 m in depth, and exposed the footings for a buttress possibly marking the original gable end of the building. The footings went down to a depth of 1 m and were vertical and smooth. By contrast, the footings for the north wall were much rougher, incorporating unworked limestone pieces, and terminated at a depth of 0.60 m. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – topsoil; 0.20 m of mid gray silty clay loam.
- (2) – subsoil/graveyard soil; 0.60 m dark gray silty clay loam.
- (3) – natural; 0.20 m mid brown/orange clay.

Test Pit 4.

Test Pit 4 measured 0.94 m east-west by 0.85 m north-south by 0.72 m in depth; the footings exposed here were both regular and vertical. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – topsoil; 0.20 m mid gray silty clay loam.
- (2) – subsoil/graveyard soil; 0.52 m dark gray silty clay loam.

Natural (3) was not exposed.

Test Pit 5.

Test Pit 5 measured 0.81 m east-west by 0.96 m north-south by 0.66 m in depth; the footings exposed here were both regular and vertical. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – topsoil; 0.20 m mid gray silty clay loam.
- (2) – subsoil/graveyard soil; 0.46 m dark gray silty clay loam.

Natural (3) was not exposed.

Test Pit 6.

Test pit 6 measured 0.98 m east-west by 0.79 m north-south by 0.75 m depth. The foundations were exposed to the full depth of the pit and were regular, and presented a vertical face. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – topsoil; 0.20 m mid gray silty clay loam.
- (2) – subsoil/graveyard soil; 0.55 m dark gray silty clay loam, quite heavily rooted.

Natural (3) was not seen.

South Inspection Chamber.

This excavation measured 0.60 m east-west by 0.90 m north-south by 0.75 m in depth. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – 0.15 m topsoil.
- (2) - 0.50 m subsoil/graveyard soil.
- (3) - 0.10 m natural clay.

Three very small fragments of human bone were retrieved from (2) and were reburied.

North Inspection chamber.

This excavation measured 0.80 m east-west by 0.90 m north-south by 0.73 m in depth. The sequence of deposits identified ran as follows:

- (1) – 0.15 m topsoil.
- (2) – 0.50 m subsoil.
- (3) – 0.08 m natural clay.

The subsoil (2) was heavily rooted here and also contained some loose fragments of stone.

6 Finds

No finds were retrieved during the course of the watching brief.

7 Environmental results

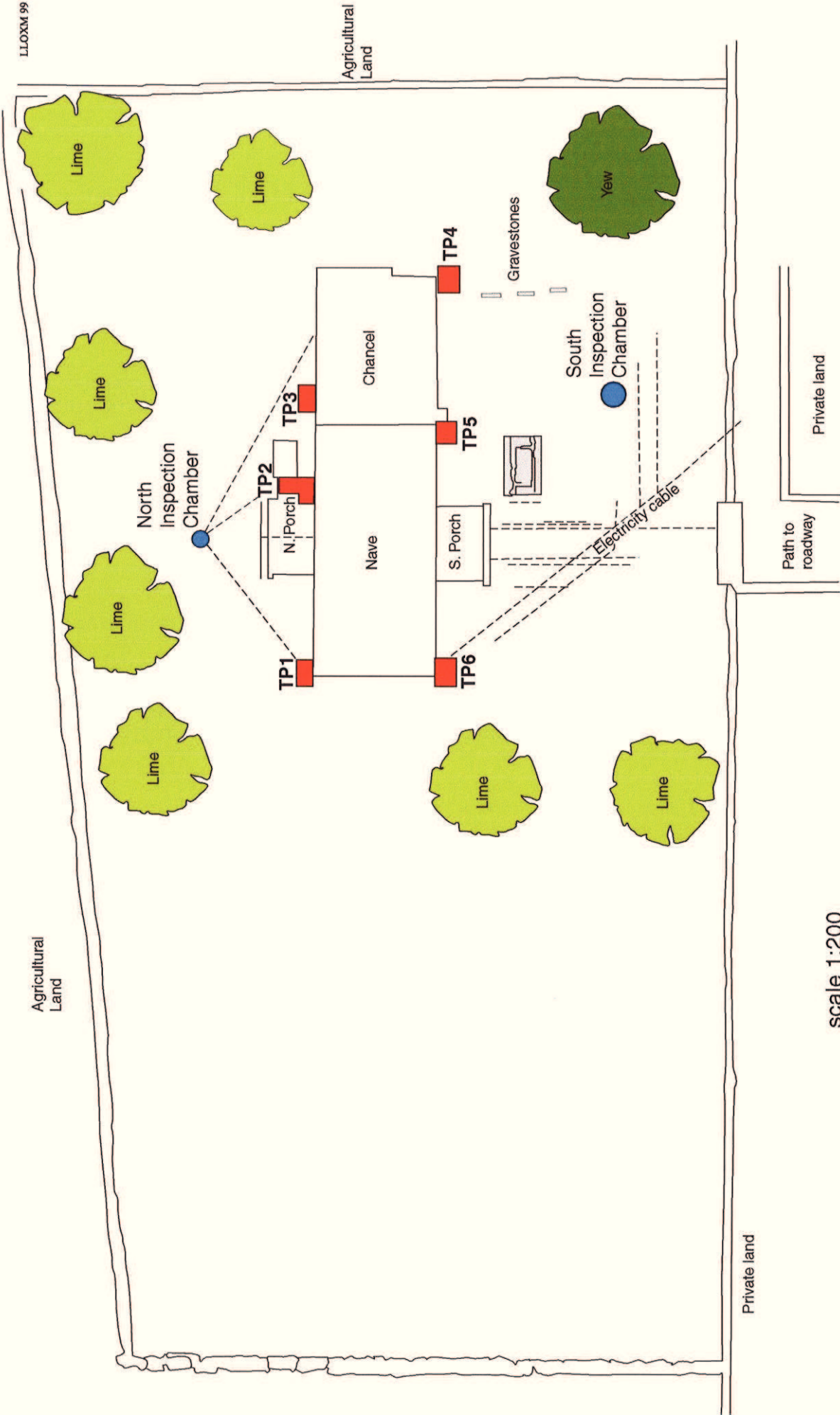
Due to the absence of any archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

The watching brief produced only negative evidence. There was an absence of archaeological features/finds and articulated inhumations from the development area. The few pieces of bone found in the south inspection chamber were not from a cut feature and probably had been disturbed by root and/or animal action.

References.

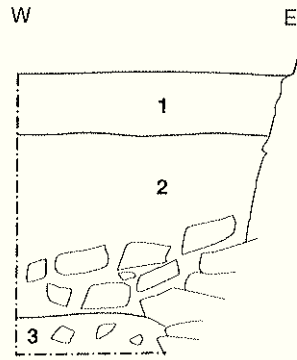
Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



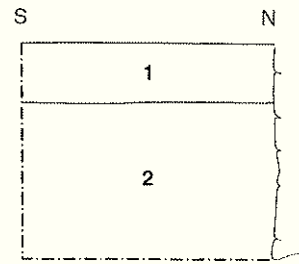
scale 1:200

figure 1: plan showing location of test pits

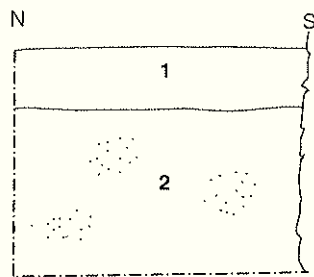
Test Pit 1



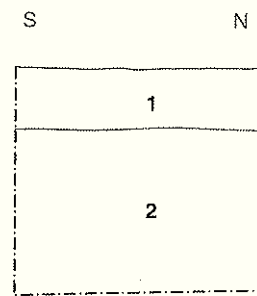
Test Pit 4



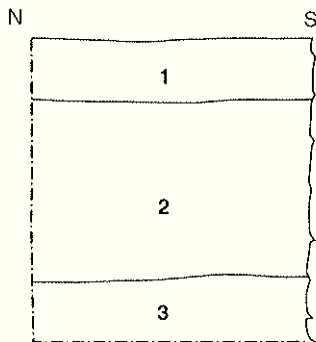
Test Pit 2



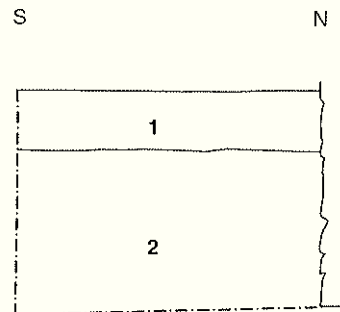
Test Pit 5



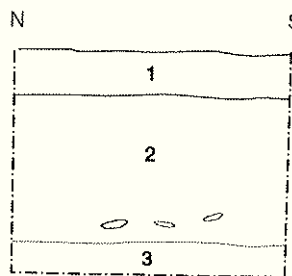
Test Pit 3



Test Pit 6



South Inspection chamber



North Inspection chamber

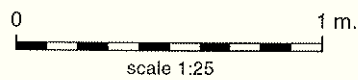
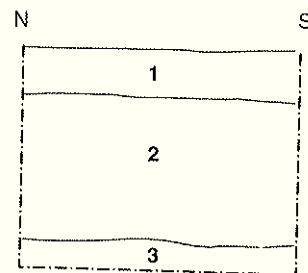


figure 2: Test Pits 1 to 6, sections



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk



Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES