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Churches Conservation Trust

St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Basildon, Berkshire

NGR SU 6117 7925

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT



Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 2000

The Churches Conservation Trust

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Report Prepared by: Kayt Brown and John Dalton (OAU)	
Positions: Project Manager and Archaeologist	
Date: 7 th February 2000	
Report Checked by: John Dalton (OAU)	
Position: Archaeologist	
Signed: <i>John Dalton</i>	Date: 7 th February 2000
Report Approved by: RJ Williams (OAU)	
Position: Head of Fieldwork	
Signed: <i>R. Williams</i>	Date: 8 th February 2000

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Summary

In July 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Basildon, Berkshire (NGR SU 6117 7925). The positions of and inscriptions on two in situ tombs were recorded, along with a patchily mortared floor surface; no finds were retrieved.

1 Introduction

The development proposal comprised the replacement of failed pew platforms as a part of a wider scheme of restoration work to both the interior and exterior of the church.

The watching brief was commissioned by Ian Angus on behalf of the Churches Conservation Trust.

2 Background (Fig. 1)

During the Roman period a ford was located at the bend in the Thames at Lower Basildon; the place-name for the ford was *Bestlesford* from which the present-day settlement takes its name. During excavations in advance of the construction of the Great Western Railway, which separates the site of the church from the village, parts of a Roman villa were uncovered.

There has been a church on the site since the 11th-century, although the present building dates to the early 13th-century. The earliest surviving portions of the fabric are the south doorway, nave and the chancel, which was rebuilt circa 1280.

The brick-built Georgian tower was constructed in 1734. There have been two previous major restorations at the church, one in 1846 and one in 1875-6 during which the knapped flint walls were restored.

The main parish is now located in Upper Basildon, which is served by St Stephen's, and St Bartholomew's stands in isolation from the village, although adjacent to the rectory and to Church Farm.

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 two separate inspection visits, on the 7th and 8th of July 1999.

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)

The replacement of rotted pew platforms on the north-east side of the church revealed the upper surfaces of two tombs. It was immediately apparent that both had previously been disturbed, possibly during the 1875-6 works. The western tomb was sealed with a mixture of mortar, cement, brick and re-used roof tiles. The east tomb had no mortar cap; the upper surface appeared to consist of backfill, with a great deal of rubble in a matrix of a gritty mid brown silty clay loam. This material also contained flint rubble and brick and roof tile fragments, and was confined to a rectangular area immediately adjacent to the west tomb.

The inscriptions on the north wall above the tombs read as follows. Above the west tomb:

“In Memory of Arthur Smith, of the Grotto in this Parish, who died 19th August 1884 and of Edith Gertrude his Wife who died 10th June 1887. Directed by their Children”.

Above the east tomb:

“In Memory of the Reverend George Ogle, Late of the Parish, who died in London on the 25th of June 1828 Aged 63. And whose Remains are deposited in a Vault under the Parish Church of St Stephens, Walbrook”.

The watching brief was also undertaken during work to provide a foundation for the step in the doorway in the south wall of the choir. After removal of the pew platform, the loose soil beneath was brushed away revealing the clean ground surface, and a photographic and drawn record was made at this stage. A very patchy mortared surface was revealed, confined to an area immediately to the north-east of the doorway. This surface clearly had been damaged in antiquity, and was seen only in this one place. The surface lay 0.11 m below the thick floor tiles seen in section in various places in the church. These initially were thought to represent an *in situ* previous floor surface; however as they were seen to lie several deep in places it is thought likely that they represent a previous surface that has been re-used as makeup for the present floor surface.

The mortared surface lay 0.31 m below the present floor surface; it did not appear to lie on undisturbed natural as several pieces of brick and tile were seen to be well embedded within the gritty mid brown silty clay loam which lay both below and immediately to the north of the mortar. As no excavation was possible the precise nature of this material remains unknown at this time, although it is thought likely that it represents heavily disturbed natural.

6 Finds

No finds were retrieved during the course of the watching brief; three small fragments of human bone were seen to be lying on the ground surface after the removal of the pew platform in the north-west part of the church. These were left untouched and subsequently were covered over by the new pew platform.

7 Environmental results

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

8 Discussion

The occupant of the east tomb remains unknown at this time, assuming that some form of burial is located below what appeared on the surface to be a backfilled shaft, as the inscription states that the Reverend Ogle's remains are interred elsewhere. The mortared surface is thought to represent an earlier, or possibly earliest, internal floor surface of the church. In the absence of any firm dating evidence this remains speculation; those pieces seen embedded in the disturbed natural immediately adjacent were all dated on site to the Victorian period, and are thought likely to have resulted from the 1875-6 restoration works.

The watching brief recorded the location, quality and condition of both the tombs and the mortared surface; the non-invasive nature of the works means that all features seen are preserved *in situ* beneath the new floor surface of the church.

References.

Raymond, L 1992 *Redundant Churches Fund: St Bartholomew, Lower Basildon, Berkshire.*

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

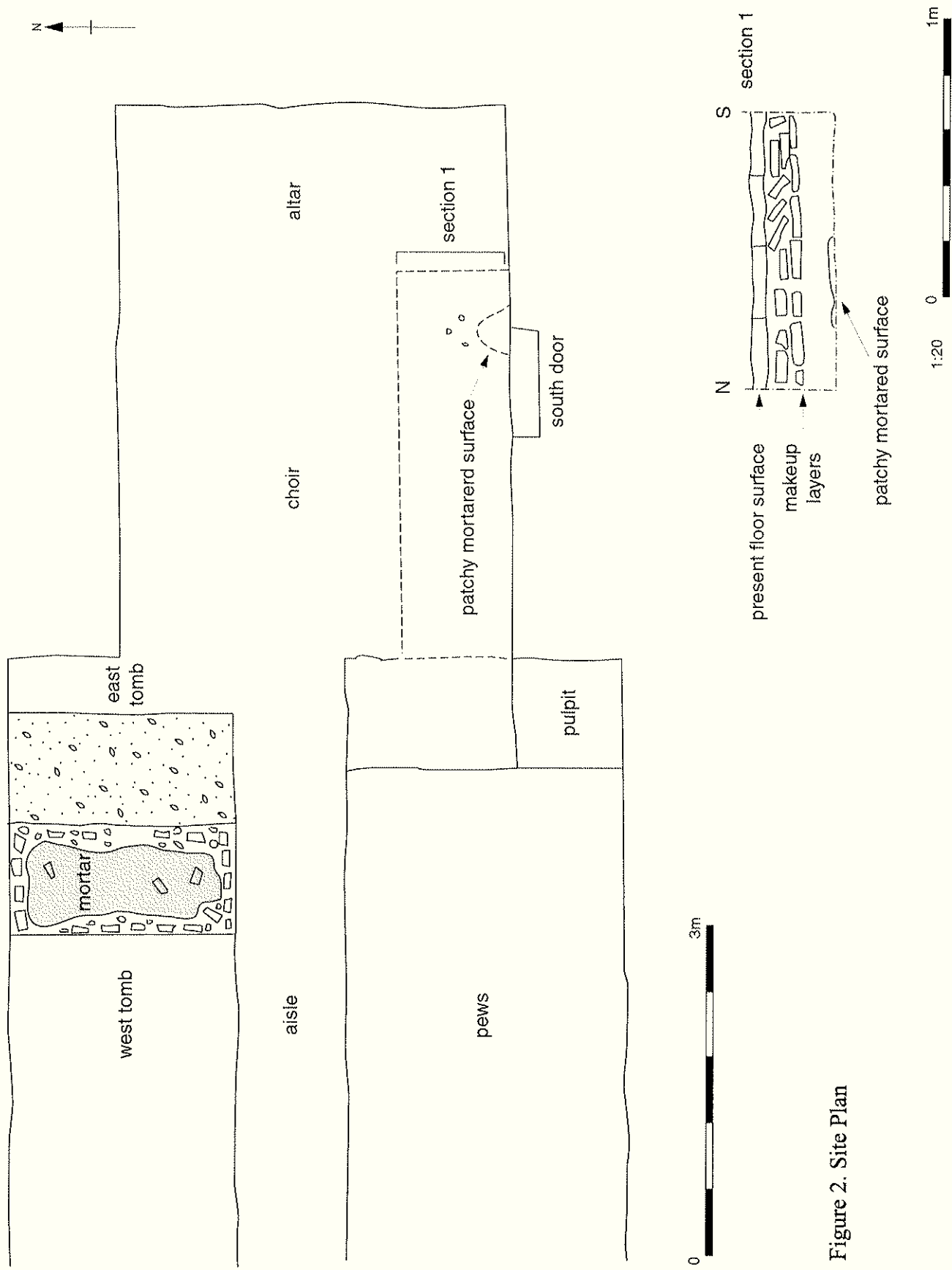


Figure 2. Site Plan



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