

St Michael and  
All Saints Church  
Letcombe Bassett  
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report**



**Client: GBS Architects**

Issue No:1  
OA Job No: 4581  
NGR: SU 374 849





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## St. Michael and All Angels Church, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire

### *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Rebecca Griffin*

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## Summary

*In March 2011 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an Archaeological Watching Brief at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire (SU 374 849) on behalf of Letcombe Bassett Parochial Church Council. The watching brief was to coincide with a programme of works including the formation of a new French drain extending around the perimeter of the church. The trench revealed a buried sub-soil beneath the existing ground level containing early modern or medieval charnel remains which were immediately re-interred following recording. No archaeological features were observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 OA were commissioned by GBS Architects, acting on behalf of Letcombe Bassett Parochial Church Council, to undertake an archaeological watching brief at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire.
- 1.1.2 The watching brief was to coincide with a programme of works revolving around the formation of a French drain, c.0.6 m wide by a maximum of 0.6 m deep, extending around the perimeter of St. Michael and All Angels Church. The works were to include two drain run-offs to soak-aways on the north of the church. The original proposal also included the creation of a new retaining wall cut into the slope along the south side of the footpath around the south side of the church, but this was later removed from the scheme.
- 1.1.3 In March 2011 OA undertook the recording and archaeological watching brief in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (OA 2009) produced by OA and agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeology Department.
- 1.1.4 In 2005 OA undertook a programme of historic building investigation at the church during works to remove and replace the building's external render.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 St. Michael and All Angels Church is located in Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire (SU 374 849) at 132 mOD c. 4 miles to the south of Wantage and c. 15 miles to the south of Oxford (Fig. 1). It lies on the north side of the Berkshire Downs and although it was formerly in the County of Berkshire it is now in South Oxfordshire. The British Geological Survey Sheet 253 shows that the site is underlain by Lower Cretaceous Chalk Deposits. The chalk is typically overlain by brown calcareous earths and argillic or paleo-argillic brown earths.

## 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Letcombe Bassett

- 2.1.1 St. Michael and All Angels Church is a Grade II\* listed building and the Listed Building Description can be found in Appendix D attached to this report.
- 2.1.2 As mentioned above OA undertook an investigation of the building in 2005 which included historical research of the principal secondary sources. The Victoria County History (written in 1914, published in 1924) includes a detailed assessment of the



church. Another valuable source is the web site [churchplansonline.org](http://churchplansonline.org) which includes a plan of the church from 1861 detailing Butterfield's proposed restoration works.

## 2.2 St Michael and All Angels: summary of phasing

2.2.1 From previous studies of the building and the previous historic building investigation undertaken by OA (OA 2005) the following chronology for the church has been developed:

- **12th century:** Original construction of church. It appears that the original church would have comprised the nave with the same footprint as that surviving today, a shorter chancel and (probably) the tower.
- **Late 13th century:** Chancel extended eastwards by c.3 m and new window inserted into south wall of (original) chancel. North door (possibly) inserted.
- **14th century:** Window inserted into south wall of nave. Chancel roof also possibly constructed.
- **15th century:** Window inserted into north wall of nave.
- **17th century:** Nave roof replaced by new, lower pitch structure.
- **18th century:** West wall of tower rebuild in brick.
- **1860s:** Major renovation of the church undertaken by Butterfield including new south aisle, vestry and porch.
- **20th century:** Walls clad in cement render (to replace previous lime render). New higher roof constructed over nave in 1950s whilst leaving previous 17th century roof intact beneath.

## 3 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Aims

3.1.1 The main aim of the project was to identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of any archaeological remains within the area of disturbance that will be caused by the excavation of the French drain and service trenches and to recover any artefacts from the excavated material.

3.1.2 To establish the location and depth of any burials or vaults which may be affected by the drainage works and to make available the results of the investigation.

### 3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 All archaeological features were recorded in plan at a scale of 1:50 and where appropriate in section drawn at a scale of 1:20, and plotted onto the base plan supplied by the architects. All excavated features were photographed using digital photography and black-and-white print negatives. A general photographic record of the work was made. All features and deposits were also issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was carried out in accordance with the established OA practice as detailed in the OA Field Manual (OA, 1992).

3.2.2 The general preference was to leave finds of minor significance in-situ, or to have them re-buried in a position as near as possible to their place of origin. Pieces of worked stone were to remain with the church, unless it was necessary to remove them for





further study. Other significant finds could, with the agreement of the incumbent, be deposited with the appropriate museum.

- 3.2.3 Where early modern or medieval human remains were disturbed in the course of the work they were treated with due care and regard to the sensitivities involved. The location of any chanel was recorded and reserved for re-burial, if immediate re-interment was not possible.
- 3.2.4 If undisturbed burials were encountered they were to be left in-situ with a presumption in favour of re-routing the trenches.
- 3.2.5 Unless it was necessary to remove for assessment by a physical anthropologist, any human bones that were disturbed during the course of the excavation work were to be carefully set aside out of sight of the public. Materials from each burial 'site' were to be stored in separate containers and these containers were stored, under lock and key within the church until the completion of the excavation works when they were to be handed to the Incumbent to direct the re-burial.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Description of deposits

- 4.1.1 A trench was excavated around the perimeter of St. Michael and All Angels Church, c. 0.6 m wide by a maximum depth of 0.6 m, following the course of a pre-existing Victorian drainage system (Fig. 2).
- 4.1.2 The earliest deposit encountered in the base of the trench was a light brown-grey silty clay (1001). Recorded in section, the sub-soil was 0.3 m thick and extended beyond the maximum depth of the excavation (Fig. 3). At the eastern end of the church a sandstone capstone was noted in the side of the trench within 1001 (Plate 4). The undisturbed burial was left *in-situ*.
- 4.1.3 Also within 1001 a number of disarticulated animal bone fragments were observed but not retained. Previously disturbed early modern or medieval human remains were also observed. These were recorded before immediately being reinterred and included:
  - One adult right mandibular ramus
  - One adult left ilium fragment
  - Two adult proximal femoral shafts
  - One adult ulna proximal head fragment
  - One adult right mid humeral shaft fragment
  - One adult rib fragment
  - Three adult long bone fragments
  - One child parietal fragment
  - One child humerus head epiphyses.
- 4.1.4 The sub-soil was overlain by topsoil 1000, a firm greyish-brown deposit 0.15 m thick, which was overlain by turf.

### 4.2 Finds

- 4.2.1 No deposits suitable for finds recovery were observed during the course of the watching brief.



### **4.3 Environmental remains**

- 4.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were identified during the course of the watching brief.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1.1 The trench extending around the perimeter of St. Michael and All Angels Church followed the footprint of a pre-existing Victorian drain system and no archaeological features were observed. Below the existing turf ground level an undisturbed burial was observed and left in-situ. A number of charnel remains were also recorded in the sub-soil deposit before immediate re-interment.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Top soil	-	20th century
1001	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	-	Sub-soil	-	20th century



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Oxford Archaeology, 2005, St Michael and All Angels Church, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire Historic Building Investigation and Recording (unpublished)

Oxford Archaeology, 2009, St Michael and All Angels Church, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire Written Scheme of Investigation (unpublished)

Page, W (ed.), 1924, The Victoria History of the County of Berkshire Vol IV

Wilkinson, D (ed.), 1992, Fieldwork Manual, Oxford Archaeology Unit (unpublished)

### **Websites**

[www.churchplansonline.org](http://www.churchplansonline.org)

[www.imagesofengland.co.uk](http://www.imagesofengland.co.uk)



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	St. Michael and All Angels Church, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire
Site code:	LBMIMA09
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SU 374 849
Type of watching brief:	General
Date and duration of project:	01/03/11
Area of site:	34.53 m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	Charnel remains within the sub-soil around the perimeter of the church were recorded before re-interment. No archaeological features were observed.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum in due course under the following accession number: OXCMS:2009.97



## APPENDIX D. LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

IoE number: 437215  
Location: Church of St Michael  
Letcombe Bassett, Vale of White Horse  
Oxfordshire  
  
Date listed: 24/11/66  
Date of last amendment: 11/12/85  
Grade II\*

## LETCOMBE BASSETT

SU38SE

01/10/10

24/11/66

GV

Church of St. Michael

(Formerly listed as St. Michael  
& All Angels)

LETCOMBE BASSETT SU38SE 10/110 Church of St. Michael 24/11/66 (Formerly listed as St. Michael & GV All Angels) II\* Church. C12, remodelled c.1861 by W. Butterfield. Chalk and sarsen coursed rubble rendered; limestone quoins and dressings; tile roof. C12 chancel; nave remodelled and south aisle and vestry built c.1861; late C13 west tower. Two-light east window much restored; north wall of chancel has C12 round-headed lancet and fine C12 doorway has roll moulded arch, scalloped capitals with 4 carved signs of the Evangelists; south wall of chancel has similar C12 lancet and 2-light late C13 windows; mid C19 vestry with pointed arches to doors in end walls. South wall of nave has two 3-light C15 windows and 3-light ogee headed window of c.1861: gabled porch of c.1861 has limestone ashlar front, flint side wall, pierced gable end bargeboard; north wall of nave has 3-light late C13 window and late C13 door with fillet and roll-moulded architrave. South aisle, c.1861, has one-, 2- and 3-light windows. Gabled roofs to nave and chancel. West tower has diagonal buttresses; late C13 two-light window set in late C17/early C18 English bond brick wall. Interior: polychrome reredos with coloured inlaid stone, tiled bands round chancel walls, piscina, altar rail, benches, floor tiles and 2-bay canted roof all of c.1861. C12 chancel arch has carved leaf trails to abaci of responds. Trefoil-headed niche for images to east wall of nave, with blocked access to rood over. Nave has trefoiled pulpit, lectern, prayer desk, benches and screen to tower room, all of c.1861; Limestone font has circular bowl narrowed to octagonal base, and cover probably of c.1861: pointed stoup next to south door: late C19 stained glass windows; 4-bay C17 common rafter roof. Arch-braced collars to roof of porch. Buildings of England, Berkshire, p.166.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location





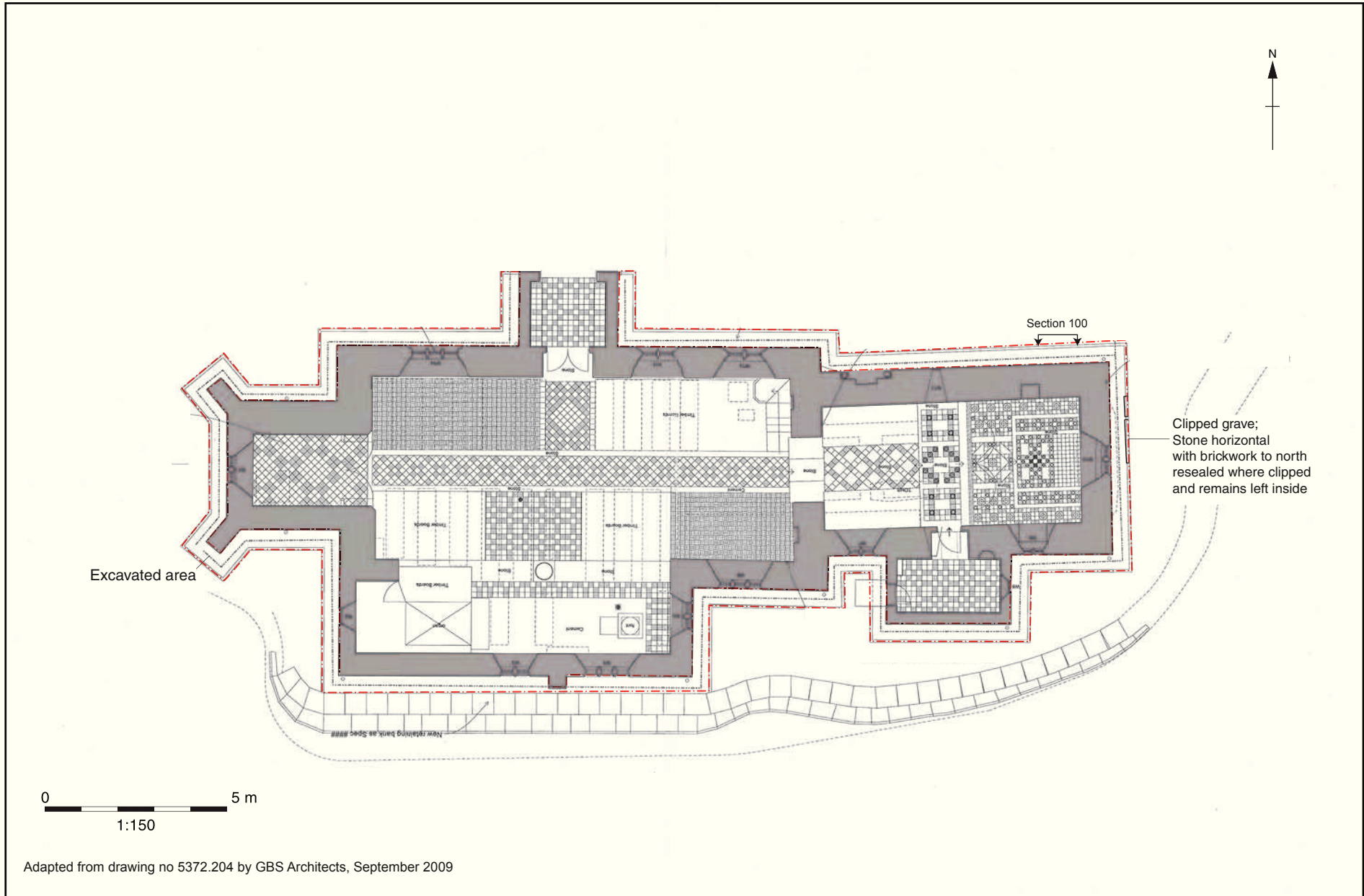


Figure 2: Site plan



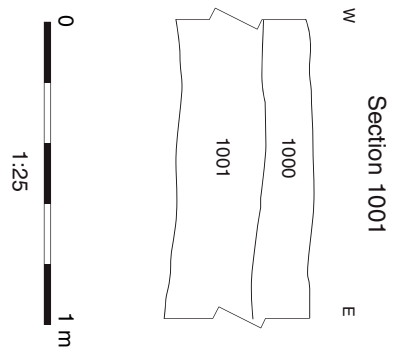


Figure 3 : Section 100





Plate 1: St. Michael's and All Saints Church, view looking south-west



Plate 2: Shot of the excavated trench, view looking west



Plate 3: Shot of the excavated trench around footings, view looking north-west



Plate 4: In-situ capstone seen in the side of the trench, view looking south-east







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