

Daniel, Lelliott, Krauze

St Thomas' Church, Simpson, Milton Keynes

NGR SP 8850 3690

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

November 1998

Daniel, Lelliott, Krauze

St Thomas' Church, Simpson, Milton Keynes

NGR SP 8850 3690

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared by: 

Date: 15/7/98

Checked by: JRH

Date: 15/7/98

Approved by: R. Williams HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date: 24/7/1998

Oxford Archaeological Unit

November 1998

Summary

In April 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief during the excavation of eight test pits at St Thomas' Church, Simpson, Milton Keynes (NGR SP 8850 3690). TP 1 was inside the church, at the base of the tower, and revealed wall footings and disturbance associated with the insertion of a modern wood panel floor. TP's 2-8 were on the exterior south and east sides of the church and revealed wall footings of the standing building; TP's 7 & 8 revealed a crudely built brick wall, possibly a former crypt. Neither undisturbed burials nor previous floor levels were present.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal comprised the excavation of eight test pits to ascertain the condition of the church foundations and ground conditions prior to the underpinning of the east wall of the chancel, the south footings of the crossing tower and a part of the south wall from the east end to the porch, including the south transept.

The watching brief was commissioned by Daniel, Lelliott, Krauze, Chartered Architects, on behalf of the church. The watching brief was requested by the Diocesan Advisory Committee's Archaeological Advisor, Mr David Miles, and was undertaken to a WSI agreed with him.

2 Background

St Thomas' Church is cruciform in plan; the arches of the crossing tower are its oldest remaining part, being late 13th century in date; it was heightened at the end of the 14th century. The majority of the church is 14th century, including the chancel, north and south transepts and the nave. A vestry, since demolished, was added between the north transept and the chancel in the 15th century. The south porch was added in the 16th century. Restoration work was undertaken at the church in 1873 and the tower was underpinned earlier this century.

This watching brief is further to one undertaken at the church in 1989 (OAU 1989), which revealed that the earlier floors in the south transept had been removed in the 18th century. A cobbled and flagged medieval floor was revealed in the north transept. The tiled floor of the demolished vestry was encountered in excavations outside the church, between the chancel and the north transept.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

One inspection visit was made to the site by prior arrangement with the subcontractor, subsequent to the excavation of the test pits which 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 descriptions use *estimated* percentages based on the use of standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Figs 2 and 3)

The sections of test pits 2 and 3 were identical to test pit 4; the section of test pit 5 was identical to test pit 6 and the section of test pit 8 was identical to that of test pit 7. Owing to time constraints these were not drawn on site, and as such are not reproduced here.

Test Pit 1 (sections 1 and 2)

- (1) – wooden panelling over a thin layer of bitumen.
- (2) – concrete with occasional medium pieces of stone, possibly disturbed and redeposited structural stone; all pieces were firmly within the cement.
- (3) – one course of modern housebricks; 0.23 m by 0.10 m by 0.07 m, mainly unfragmented red brick with a few broken pieces.
- (4) – mixed grayish brown sandy loam with 15% small-large stone fragments and lenses of mortar.
- (5) – dark gray/brown sandy loam with approximately 30% medium-large angular stone rubble.
- (6) – angular, irregularly placed stone footings of the tower, surrounded by a pale yellow/brown silt loam.

Test Pit 2

- (20) – large, roughly squared sandstone blocks with no apparent mortar bonding, protruding approximately 0.18 m from perpendicular.
- (21) – medium sized rounded and subrounded cobbles, also with broken fragments of same, averaging 0.10 m in diameter, in a reddish brown loamy clay matrix; 60% cobbles to 40% loamy clay.
- (22) – large subangular and subrounded sandstone pieces in a reddish brown loamy clay matrix, in a 50/50 ratio.
- (23) – brown clay loam with a progressively higher percentage of mortar inclusions towards its northern end; the mortar was very powdery, very pale yellowish brown with much small angular stone.
- (24) – brown clay loam with approximately 5% mixed very small stones and pebbles.
- (25) – bright orange sandy waterlogged clay, seen just above the level of groundwater.

Test Pit 3

- (30) – large, roughly squared sandstone blocks with no apparent mortar bonding, protruding approximately 0.18 m from perpendicular.
- (31) – medium sized rounded and subrounded cobbles, also with broken fragments of same, averaging 0.10 m in diameter, in a reddish brown loamy clay matrix; 60% cobbles to 40% loamy clay.

- (32) – large subangular and subrounded sandstone pieces in a reddish brown loamy clay matrix, in a 50/50 ratio.
- (33) – brown clay loam with a progressively higher percentage of mortar inclusions towards its northern end; the mortar was very powdery, very pale yellowish brown with much small angular stone.
- (34) – brown clay loam with approximately 5% mixed very small stones and pebbles.
- (35) – very pale yellowish brown waterlogged clay, seen just above the level of groundwater.

Test Pit 4 (sections 7 and 8)

- (13) – large, roughly squared sandstone blocks with no apparent mortar bonding, protruding approximately 0.18 m from perpendicular.
- (14) – medium sized rounded and subrounded cobbles, also with broken fragments of same, averaging 0.10 m in diameter, in a reddish brown loamy clay matrix; 60% cobbles to 40% loamy clay.
- (15) – large subangular and subrounded sandstone pieces in a reddish brown loamy clay matrix, in a 50/50 ratio.
- (16) – brown clay loam with a progressively higher percentage of mortar inclusions towards its northern end; the mortar was very powdery, very pale yellowish brown with much small angular stone.
- (17) – brown clay loam with approximately 5% mixed very small stones and pebbles.
- (18) – very pale yellowish brown waterlogged clay, seen just above the level of groundwater.

Test Pit 5

- (50) – subangular sandstone footings, protruding 0.20 m from perpendicular, mostly obscured by abutting soil (51).
- (51) – reddish brown loamy clay with occasional redeposited stone pieces.
- (52) – pale yellowish brown clay, mostly obscured by groundwater.

Test Pit 6 (sections 5 and 6)

- (10) – subangular sandstone footings, protruding 0.20 m from perpendicular, mostly obscured by abutting soil (11).
- (11) – reddish brown loamy clay with occasional redeposited stone pieces.
- (12) – pale yellowish brown clay, mostly obscured by groundwater.

Test Pit 7 (sections 3 and 4)

- (7) – topsoil; dark brown clay loam.
- (8) – crudely-built red brick wall, approximately 0.35 m below present ground surface. Stretcher-built with bricks circa 0.23 m long by 0.09 m deep, bonded with a pale yellowish gray mortar. The northern face of the wall as exposed within this test pit has mortar protruding from the wall face at the joints, suggesting that this is the back face of this wall. The wall curves gently back into the section, away from the church; no walling was visible in test pit 6, just to the south-east, but a similar structure was seen in the south face of test pit 8, immediately to the west.
- (9) – redeposited, disturbed reddish brown loamy clay with approximately 6% mixed stone, some small pebbles and a small quantity of human charnel.

The wall footings of the standing building remained obscured by deposits (7) and (9).

Test Pit 8

(80) – topsoil; dark brown clay loam.

(81) – crudely-built red brick wall, approximately 0.35 m below present ground surface. Stretcher-built with bricks circa 0.23 m long by 0.09 m deep, bonded with a pale yellowish gray mortar. The northern face of this wall as exposed within this test pit has mortar protruding from the wall face at the joints, suggesting that this is the back face of this wall. The wall curves gently back into the section, away from the church; a similar structure was seen in the south face of test pit 7, immediately to the east.

(82) – redeposited, disturbed reddish brown loamy clay with approximately 6% mixed stone, some small pebbles and occasional disturbed fragments of human bone.

The wall footings of the standing building remained obscured by deposits (80) and (82).

8 Discussion

Test pit 1 revealed that the church floor had been removed and replaced with a wooden panelled floor over a concrete foundation, resting on one course of modern housebricks. Disturbance associated with this reached the upper horizon of deposit (5), and was sufficiently invasive to remove any earlier floor layers, if present. Also the stone footings of the tower were exposed and were seen not to be very substantial, at least within the confines of the test pit.

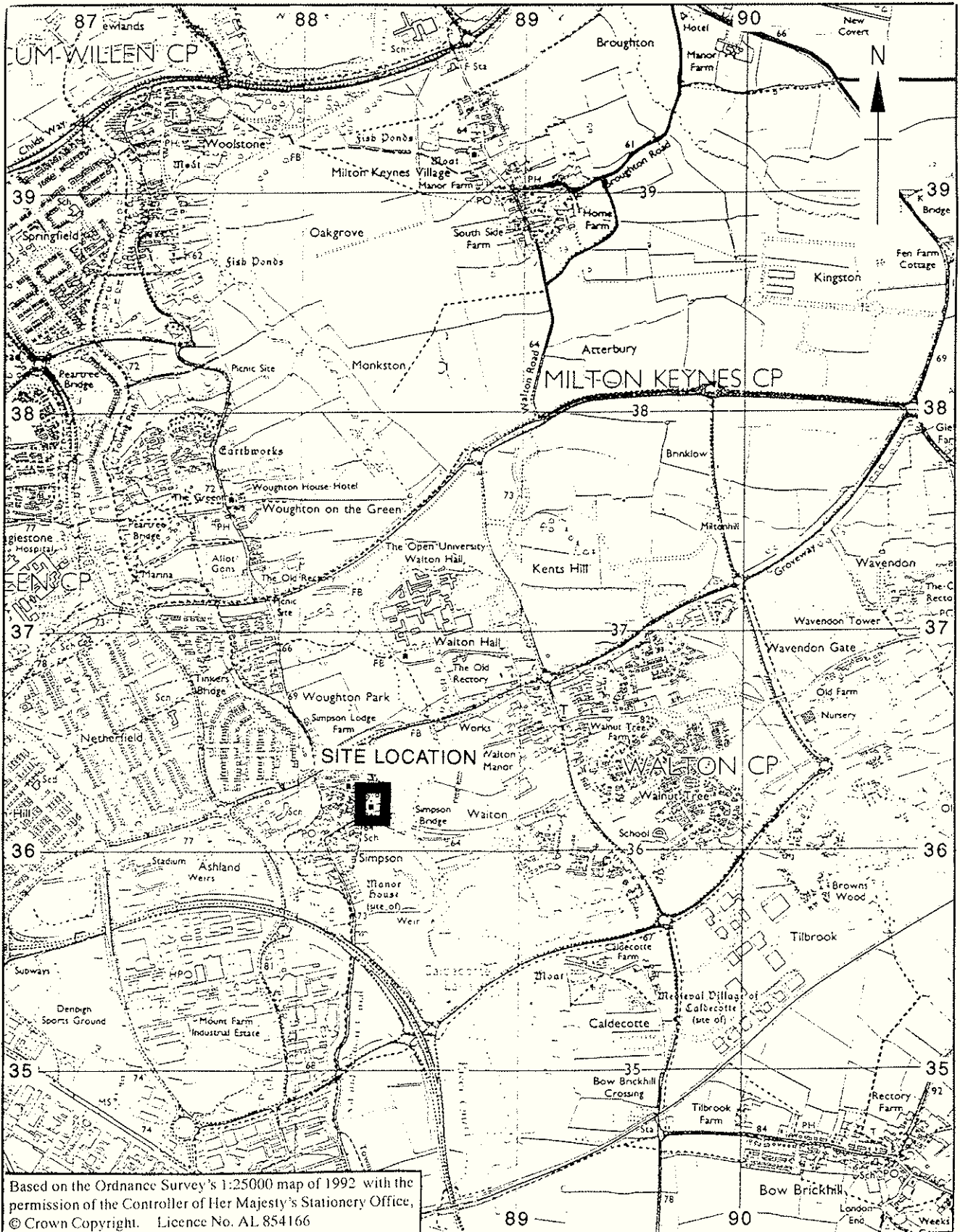
Test pits 2,3,4,5 and 6 revealed the lower wall footings on the exterior of the church, protruding a mean distance of 0.20 m from perpendicular. The squared stone footings were underlain by soil with cobbles and large unworked and fairly random stone pieces. The mortary spread seen in deposits (23), (33) and (16) may be associated with the 1873 restoration work.

Test pits 7 and 8 revealed a crudely built brick wall approximately 0.90 m to the south of the church; the upper surface of this feature appeared at approximately 0.35 m below the present ground surface, where it appeared to be vertical, and then curved gently away from the church, disappearing into the section. It was thought likely that this possibly represented a former crypt, or other subterranean graveyard feature, associated with the church as it was before the 1873 restoration work.

References.

OAU 1989 St Thomas Church, Simpson, Milton Keynes. Archaeological Watching Brief Report.

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

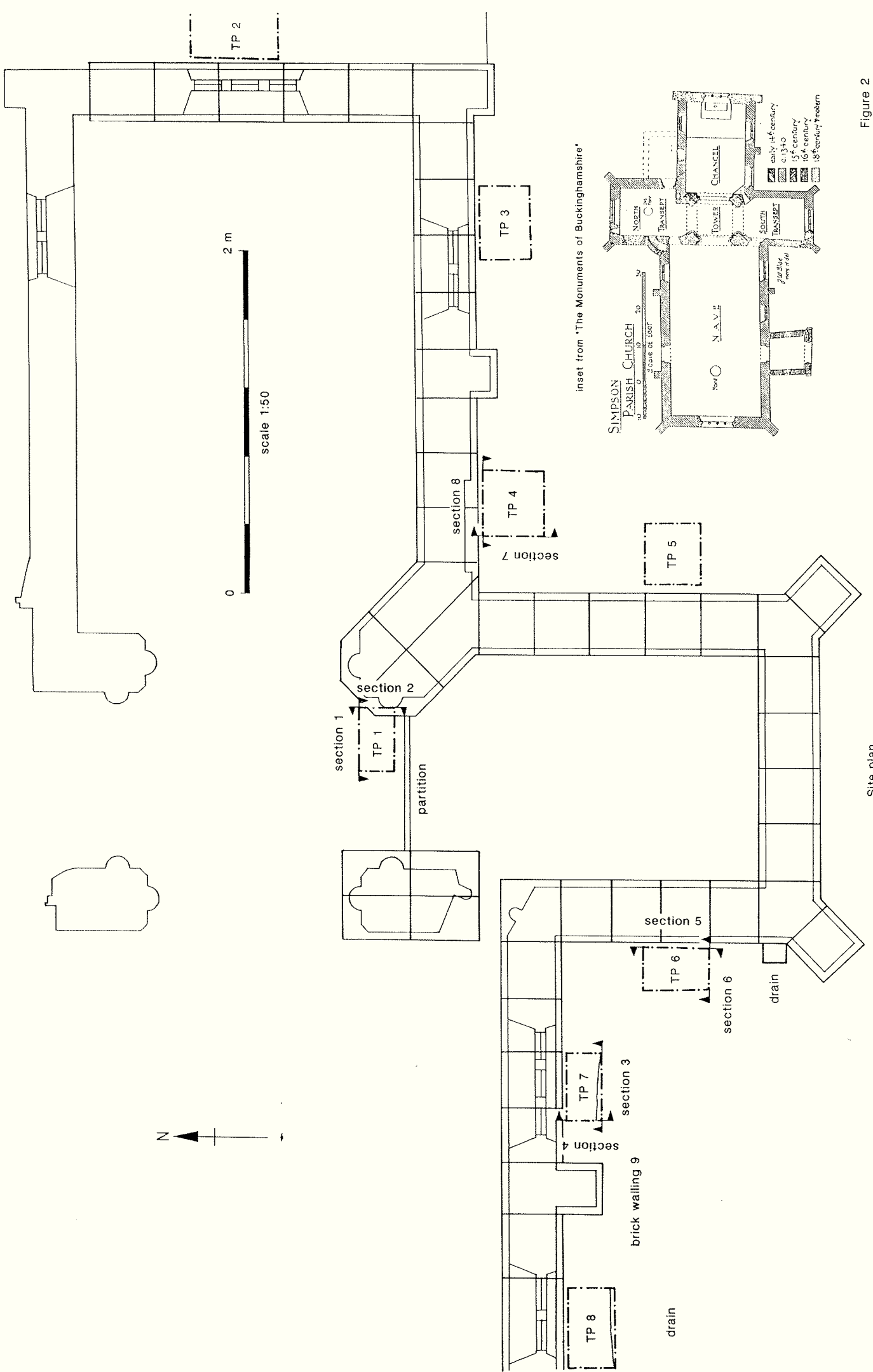


Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:25000 map of 1992 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. Licence No. AL 854166

scale 1:25,000

location of site

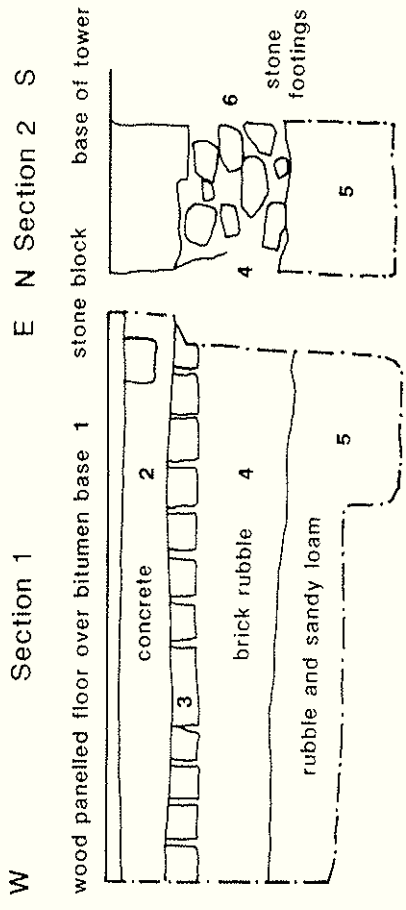
Figure 1



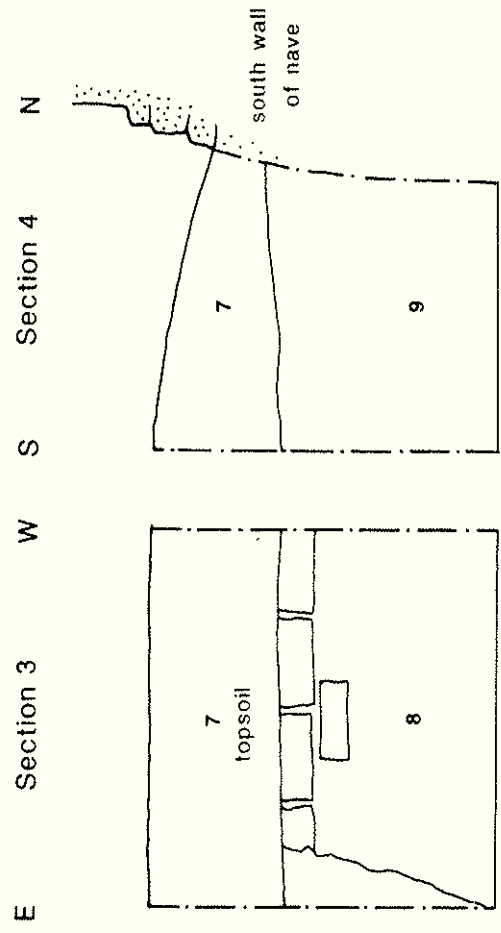
Site plan

Figure 2

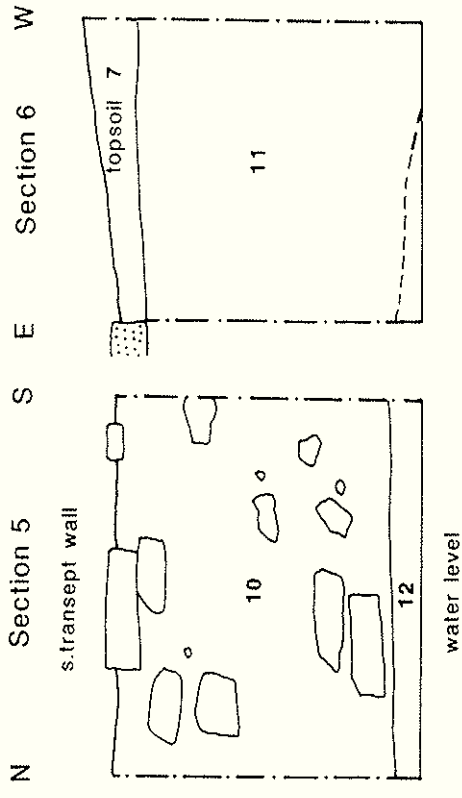
TP 1



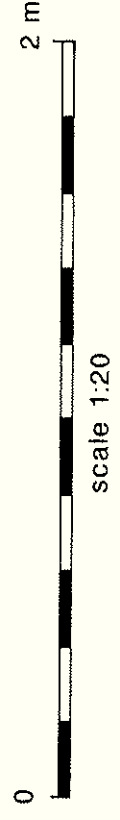
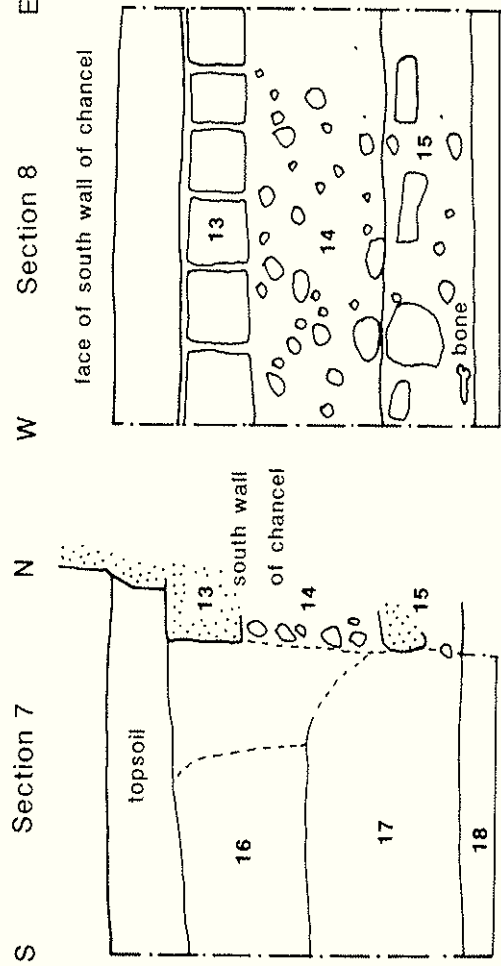
TP 7



TP 6



TP 4



Sections

Figure 3



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Telephone: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: oau-oxford.demon.co.uk



Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.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