

St Peter's and St Paul's Church, Olney, Buckinghamshire.

NGR SP 4890 2509

Archaeological Watching brief.



Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1998

SS Peter and Paul, Olney, Bucks (OLPP 95)

Shenstone & Partners

**The Church of St Peter and St Paul, Olney,
Buckinghamshire**

NGR SP 4890 2509

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared by:

John Dalt

Date:

24/6/98

Checked by:

Date:

Approved by:

Date:

Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1998

SS Peter and Paul, Olney, Bucks (OLPP 95)

Summary

In September and December 1995 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Olney, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 4890 2509). The watching brief was undertaken during renovation and rebuilding work inside the tower, and also during the excavation of new service trenches immediately to the north and west of the church. During the ground work inside the tower the original medieval graveyard soil on which the tower was built was exposed and a small number of medieval pot sherds were retrieved from this deposit. Two features cut into the buried soil appeared to be the tops of graves which predated the tower. Numerous layers of compacted clay and mortar overlying the buried soil represented the remains of earlier floor surfaces within the tower, dating from the medieval and post-medieval periods. A number of post-medieval pits were discovered cutting through the various earlier floor levels, and one of these appeared to have been used for casting lead used in the construction and/or repair of the leaded windows. Part of a much larger, vertically sided feature was also discovered cut from the higher levels of the buried floor layers, and this appeared to be the top of a post-medieval grave, representing an internal burial in the north-east corner of the tower. The only deposit observed beneath the present tarmac and gravel surfaces in the external service trenches was the buried graveyard soil containing numerous fragments of human bone.

1 Introduction

The development proposal comprised the creation of a gallery, tea room and WC in the west tower, requiring the excavation of six stanchion holes, and two pipe trenches inside the tower and the excavation of two service trenches through the graveyard immediately to the north and east of the church.

The watching brief was commissioned by Shenstone & Partners, the project architects, on behalf of the Church. It was undertaken in consultation with the Diocesan Advisory Committee's Archaeological Advisor, Mr David Miles, following approval of a faculty for the work by the Oxford DAC.

2 Background (Fig. 1 and cover illustration)

The church of St Peter and St Paul lies at the south end of the town of Olney. The present building is believed to contain elements of a 12th century structure, but mainly dates from the 14th century. At this time the chancel was rebuilt and enlarged, the north and south aisles added and also the distinctive tower and spire.

The south aisle was almost completely rebuilt at the end of the 19th century, and the entire building was extensively restored in the 19th and 20th centuries.

This watching brief was undertaken prior to the 1998 watching brief, also undertaken by the OAU on new drainage works outside the church, which identified quantities of human chanel and grave cuts in a buried graveyard soil (OAU 1998).

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

The watching brief was undertaken by R J Williams, who made several inspection visits to the site by prior arrangement with/notification by the main subcontractors. Human remains, when encountered, were discreetly handled, kept covered and retained for reburial at the completion of works.

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

The Tower

(See Fig. 2a for location of stanchion holes and internal pipe trenches, and Fig. 3 for a sample of the sections).

The six stanchion holes, which measured 600 mm square in plan and up to 750 mm in depth were located close to the internal faces of the north and south walls of the tower, though one of them (No. 6) was slightly offset towards the centre of the tower. The two internal pipe trenches formed an oblique "T" shaped trench at the west end of the tower, measuring approximately 300 mm in width and 400 mm in depth. The southern section of the pipe trench (Trench 1) also extended 6.5 m outside the tower, crossing the threshold of the west door.

The excavation of the stanchion holes and trenches revealed similar types of deposits throughout the internal area of the tower.

At any depth of more than c. 400 mm below the present floor surface a fairly uniform deposit of brownish silty loam was encountered. This deposit contained occasional pieces of human bone and almost certainly was the original medieval graveyard soil on which the tower was built. A single sherd of medieval pottery was retrieved from this soil in stanchion hole 3 (Figs. 3c and d, layer (10)) and two other medieval rim sherds were found in the excavated spoil from this level. The tops of two deep features cut into the buried soil could be observed in stanchion hole 2 (Fig. 3b, feature [12]) and stanchion hole 3 (Figs. 3c and d, feature [18]). Though only a small part of these features was visible it would seem most likely that these were graves predating

the construction of the tower. Above this level were numerous deposits of clayey loam, rubble and compacted layers of mortar which appeared to represent previous floor surfaces and their various makeup layers. It is possible that the earliest of these floor surfaces dates from the medieval period, however the only datable find retrieved was a sherd of late medieval pottery from one of the upper floor layers located in pipe trench 2 (Fig. 3e, layer (5), which may well have been redeposited.

The eastern edge of a deep vertically sided feature, cut from one of the upper floor layers, was visible in stanchion hole 1 (Fig. 3a, feature [12]), and this appeared to be the top of a grave representing an internal post-medieval burial beneath the floor of the tower.

Six small pits were also discovered cut from various levels through the apparent floor layers; one in stanchion holes 4 and 6, two in stanchion hole 3 (Figs. 3c and d, features [17] and [19]) and two in pipe trench 2 (Fig. 3e, features 9 and 17). Although no datable finds were retrieved from any of the pits, the levels from which they were cut suggested that they almost certainly were post-medieval in date, although their function remains unclear at this time. However, one of the pits contained in pipe trench 2 (Figs. 3e and f, feature [9]) contained layers of ash, and the sides and lower fill were scorched red from burning. A single piece of lead window came was retrieved from the upper fill of the pit, perhaps suggesting that this particular pit was used for casting lead for use in the construction and periodic repair of the windows.

The pits and earlier floor layers were sealed beneath a layer of poor grade concrete of a probable 19th century date, which extended throughout the tower.

The area of pipe trench 1 which extended outside the west door of the tower revealed only graveyard soil buried beneath a layer of gravel and the present tarmac ground surface.

The External Service Trenches

(See Fig. 2b for location of external trenches)

The first section of the external service trenches (Trench 3) ran diagonally from the front of the west tower to the north porch, and the second section (Trench 4) continued eastward along the length of the gravel path which lies immediately to the north of the church. The trenches were approximately 300 mm wide and up to 1 m deep. Three deeper sections, up to 1.5 m deep, were excavated prior to the construction of manholes within them, and these were located at the south-west end of trench 3, at the junction between trenches 3 and 4, and at the east end of trench 4. All of these trenches and manholes were hand-excavated.

Below the modern makeup layers for the present tarmac path the only deposit observed throughout these trenches was a silty clay soil, up to 500 mm thick. This deposit had been extensively disturbed by grave digging and contained fairly frequent pieces of human bone, although there was a noticeably greater occurrence of bone in trench 3 than in trench 4. In the deeper sections of the trench the graveyard soil was

seen to directly overlay the natural silt subsoil, encountered at a depth of 1.10 m below the present ground surface. No archaeological features were located in either of the trenches and no finds were retrieved. All of the human chanel encountered was bagged and stored prior to its reburial at the conclusion of groundworks.

6 Discussion

The watching brief recorded deposits associated with the medieval graveyard buried beneath the tower, and also the earliest floor levels of the tower itself along with post-medieval deposits consisting of later floor levels, pits and an internal grave. The comparatively shallow depth of the various groundworks, both inside the tower and in the graveyard, meant that although the tops of several graves were encountered, no articulated *in situ* burial was disturbed during the course of the groundworks.

No evidence of earlier structures nor any structural features were found beneath the floor of the tower; the discovery of possible grave cuts which predate the construction of the tower, cut into a soil containing human chanel from even earlier burials, reveals that the tower was constructed on an area of the medieval churchyard which had already been in use as a graveyard for some considerable length of time.

The external service trenches did not reveal any significant archaeological deposits other than the buried graveyard soil. However, it was observed that there was a much greater occurrence of disturbed human bone in the soil to the west of the church than to the north. Although this may simply suggest that there has been a greater tradition of burial on the west side of the church it could also demonstrate that this area of the graveyard has a longer history of burial; this would correlate with the evidence of early graves and burial activity discovered beneath the tower.

References.

OAU 1998 The Church of St Peter and St Paul, Olney, Buckinghamshire. Archaeological Watching Brief Report.

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

Table of Contexts and Finds

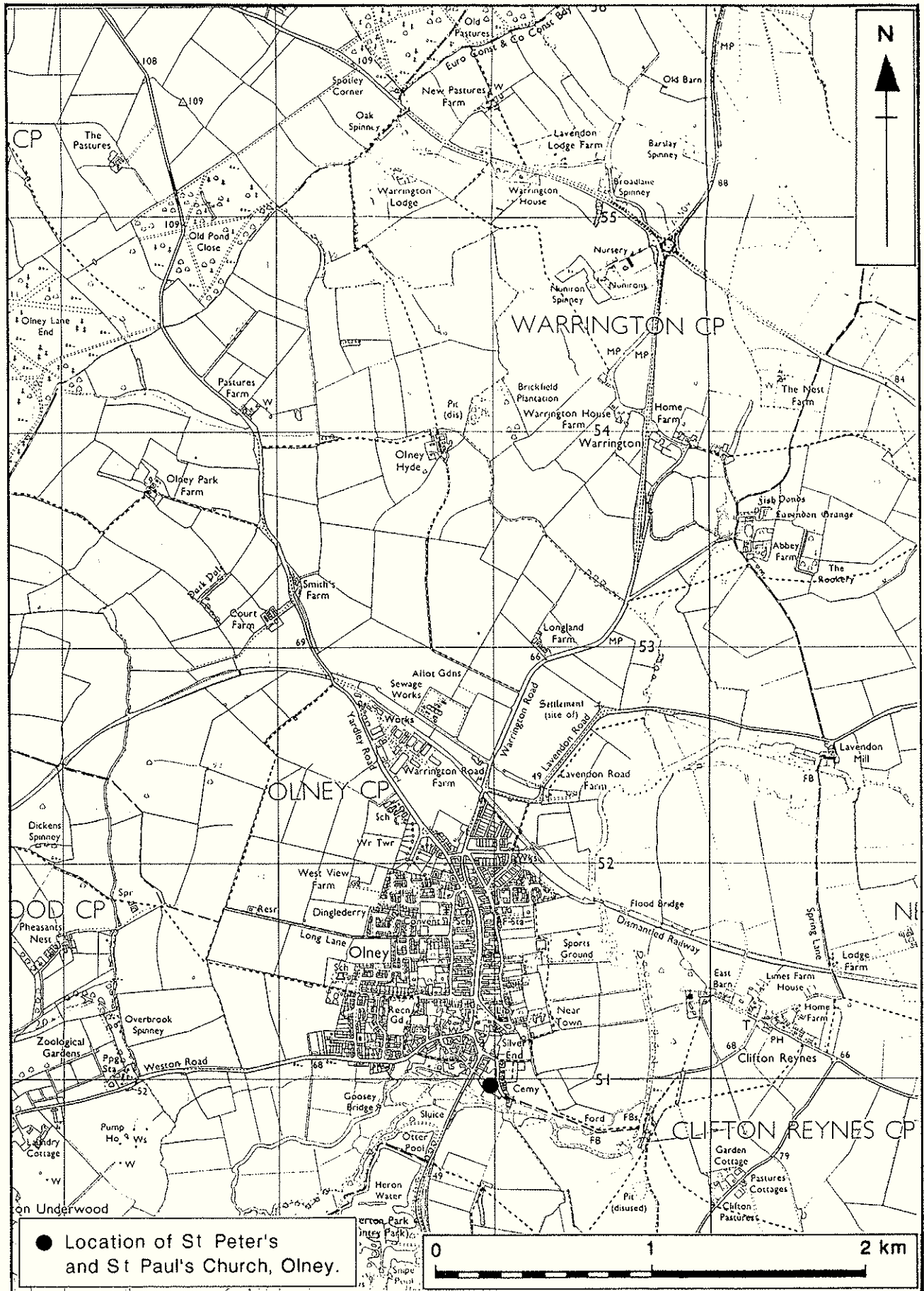
STANCHION HOLE NO.	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH (metres)	COMMENTS	FINDS
1	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Layer		0.10	Concrete and rubble	
	4	Floor layer		0.07	Dusty mortar	
	5	Layer		0.02	Ashy deposit	
	6	Floor layer		0.03	Mortar floor ?	
	7	Floor layer		0.03	Compacted clay	
	8	Floor layer		0.05	Brownish mortar	
	9	Layer		0.08	Clayey loam	
	10	Layer		0.04	Mortar and fragments of limestone	
	11	Grave fill		> 0.60	Fill of grave 12	
	12	Grave	> 0.25	> 0.60	Grave	
	13	Layer		> 0.40	Original graveyard soil	
2	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Concrete		0.09	Modern concrete	
	4	Layer		0.05	Dusty mortar	
	5	Layer		0.04	Ashy deposit	
	6	Floor layer		0.03	Mortar floor ? (burnt)	
	7	Floor layer		0.15	Mortar floor?	
	8	Layer		0.09	Clayey soil	
	9	Layer		0.06	Mortar and rubble	
	10	Pit fill		> 0.28	Gravel and mortar fill of pit 12	
	11	Layer		> 0.30	Original graveyard soil	
	12	Pit	> 0.50	> 0.28	Pit or possibly a grave ?	
3	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Concrete		0.08	Modern concrete	

STANCHION HOLE NO.	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH (metres)	COMMENTS	FINDS
	4	Layer		0.07	Dusty deposit	
	5	Layer		0.02	Mortar lens	
	6	Layer		0.03	Mortar charcoal and dust	
	7	Floor layer		0.07	Brownish mortar	
	8	Layer		0.03	Clayey loam	
	9	Floor layer		0.17	Mortar Floor ?	
	10	Layer		> 0.35	Original graveyard soil	1 sherd of medieval pottery
	11	Fill		> 0.26	Gravelly loam fill of pit\grave 18	
	12	Pit fill		0.32	Dusty mortar fill of pit 17	
	13	Pit fill		0.23	Dusty mortar fill of pit 19	
	14	Layer		0.03	Lens of lime putty mortar	
	15	Layer		0.02	Lens of lime putty	
	16	Layer		0.04	Clayey loam	
	17	Pit	> 0.40	0.32	Post-medieval pit	
	18	Pit\Grave?	> 0.60	> 0.26	Early feature, possibly a grave	
	19	Pit	0.50	0.23	Post-medieval pit	
4	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	York stone kerb	0.20	0.14		
	3	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	4	Concrete		0.15	Modern concrete	
	5	Layer		0.04	Loam	
	6	Floor layer		0.02	Mortar floor ?	
	7	Floor layer		0.10	Mortar floor ?	
	8	Layer		0.32	Clayey loam	
	9	Floor layer		0.26	Mortar floor ?	
	10	Layer		> 0.15	Original graveyard soil	
	11	Pit fill		0.26	Dusty mortar fill of pit 12	
	12	Pit	0.50	0.26	post-medieval pit	

STANCHION HOLE NO.	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH (metres)	COMMENTS	FINDS
5	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Concrete		0.09	Modern concrete	
	4	Floor layer		0.11	Mortar floor	
	5	Layer		0.02	Dusty deposit	
	6	Wall footing			Offset footing of tower	
	7	mortar matrix of 6			Orange brown sandy mortar	
	8	Layer		0.17	Clayey loam	
	9	Layer		> 0.34	Original graveyard soil	
6	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Concrete		0.09	Modern concrete	
	4	Layer		0.04	Comapcted dusty deposit	
	5	Floor layer		0.09	Mortar floor	
	6	Floor layer		0.02	Mortar floor	
	7	Layer		0.08	Clayey loam	
	8	Layer		> 0.35	Original graveyard soil	
	9	Pit fill		0.26	Dusty mortar fill of pit 10	
	10	Pit	0.35	0.26	post-medieval pit	
TRENCH No.						
1	1	Tiles		0.03	Present tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Floor layer		0.10	Concrete and rubble	
	4	Layer		0.04	Mortar lens	
	5	Floor layer		0.06	Ashy deposit	1 sherd of medieval pottery
	6	Floor layer		0.05	Mortar lens	
	7	Floor layer		0.04	Ashy mortar	

Trench No.	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH (metres)	COMMENTS	FINDS
	8	Layer		0.02	Mortar lens	
	9	Floor layer		0.10	Brownish mortar	
	10	Floor layer		0.08	Mortar and rubble	
	11	Layer		0.10	Clayey loam	
	12	Floor layer		0.12	Mortar and rubble	
	13	Wall matrix of 14			Orange brown sandy mortar	
	14	Wall Foundation			Wall beneath threshold of west door	
	15	Tarmac		0.10	Present surface	
	16	Layer		0.16	Gravel	
	17	Layer		> 0.35	Original graveyard soil	
	18	Fill of pipe trench		> 0.40	Modern	
	19	Pipe trench	0.44	> 0.40	Contains modern salt glaze pipe	
	20	Fill of foundation trench 21		> 0.30	Clayey gravel	
	21	Foundation trench for tower				
2	1	Tiles		0.03	Present Tile floor	
	2	Cement		0.04	Tile cement	
	3	Floor layer		0.10	Concrete and rubble	
	4	York stone kerb	0.35	0.18	Left in situ	
	5	Floor layer		0.03		
	6	Pit fill		0.10	Dusty mortar fill in top of pit 9	1 piece of lead window came
	7	Pit fill		0.02	Ashy fill within pit 9	
	8	Pit fill		0.15	Fire reddened motar fill in bottom of pit 9	
	9	Pit	0.78	0.30	Pit, possibly used for casting lead ?.	
	10	Floor layer		0.08	Brownish mortar	
	11	Floor layer		0.09	Yellowish mortar	
	12	Layer		0.06	Brownish clay	

Trench No.	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH (metres)	COMMENTS	FINDS
	13	Layer		> 0.10	Rubble and mortar	
	14	Offset footing of west tower wall			Limestone	
	15	Layer		> 0.10	Original graveyard soil	
	16	Fill of pit		0.24	Dusty mortar fill of pit 17	
	17	Pit	0.50	0.24	Small post-medieval pit	
	18	North wall of tower				
3	1	Tarmac		0.08	Present tarmac surface	
	2	Hardcore layer		0.28	Make-up for tarmac surface	
	3	Buried soil		0.25	Recently buried topsoil	
	4	Graveyard soil		0.50	Contains frequent pieces of disturbed human bone	
	5	Natural subsoil			Reddish brown silty gravel	
	6	Pipe trench	0.60	0.55	Modern	
4	1	Tarmac		0.07	Present tarmac surface	
	2	Hardcore layer		0.25	Make-up layer for tarmac	
	3	Buried soil		0.25	Recently buried topsoil	
	4	Graveyard soil		> 0.40	Contains occasional pieces of disturbed human bone	



SP 85/95
Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:25000 map of 1988 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright. Licence No. AL 854166

Figure 1

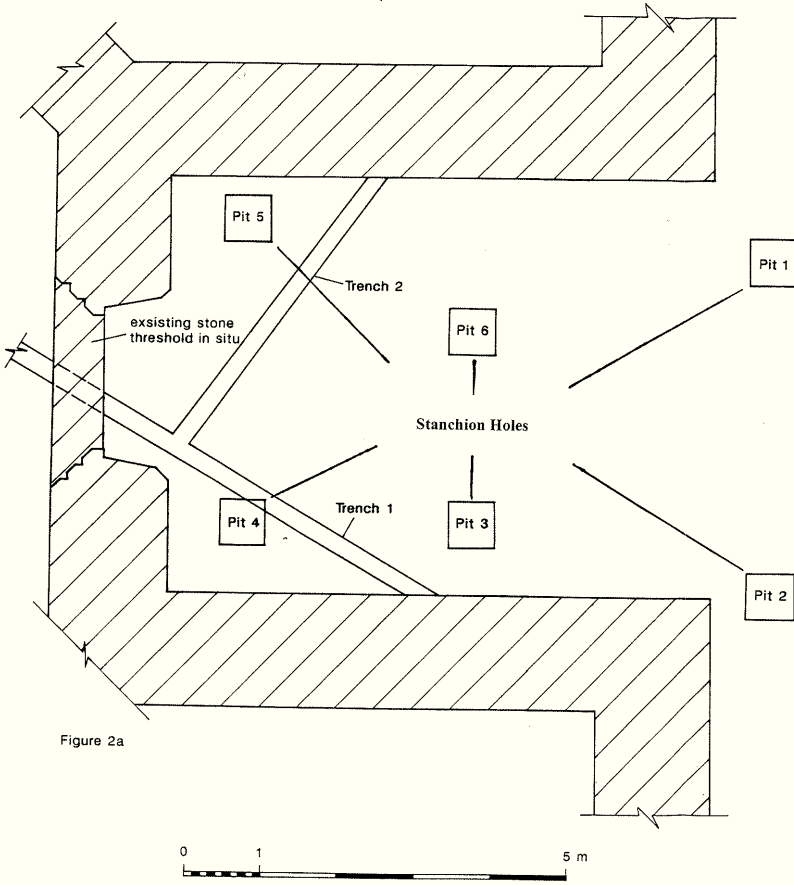


Figure 2a

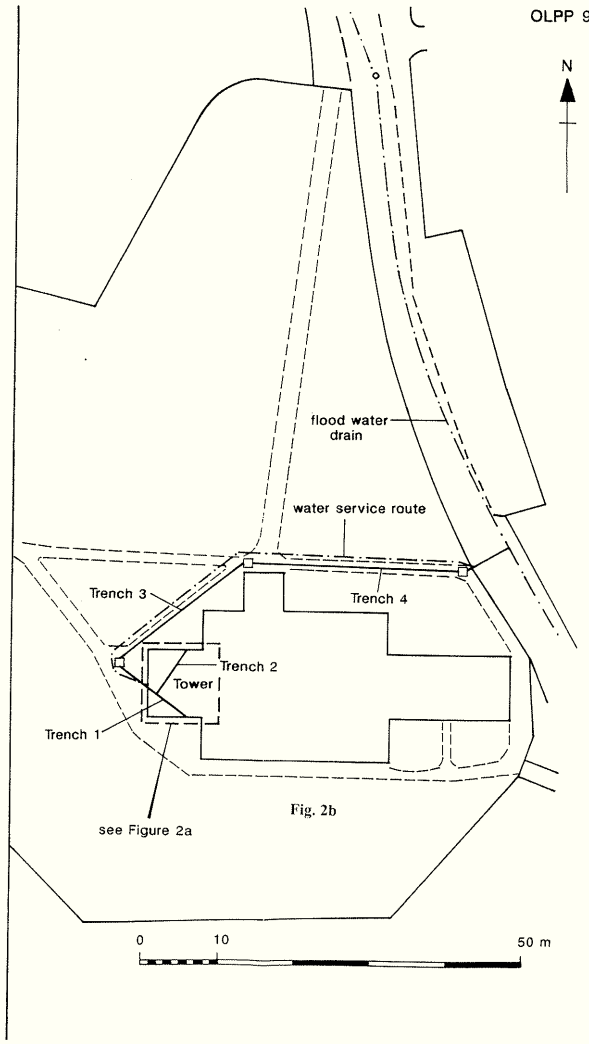


Fig. 2b

Figure 2

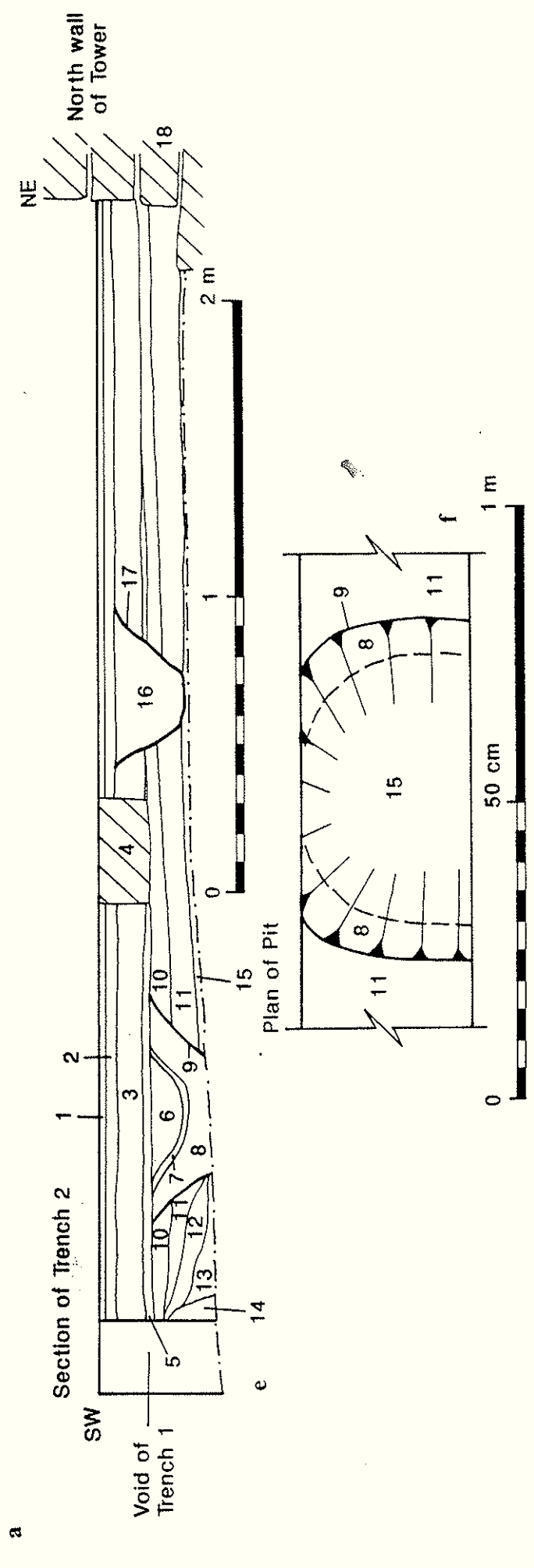
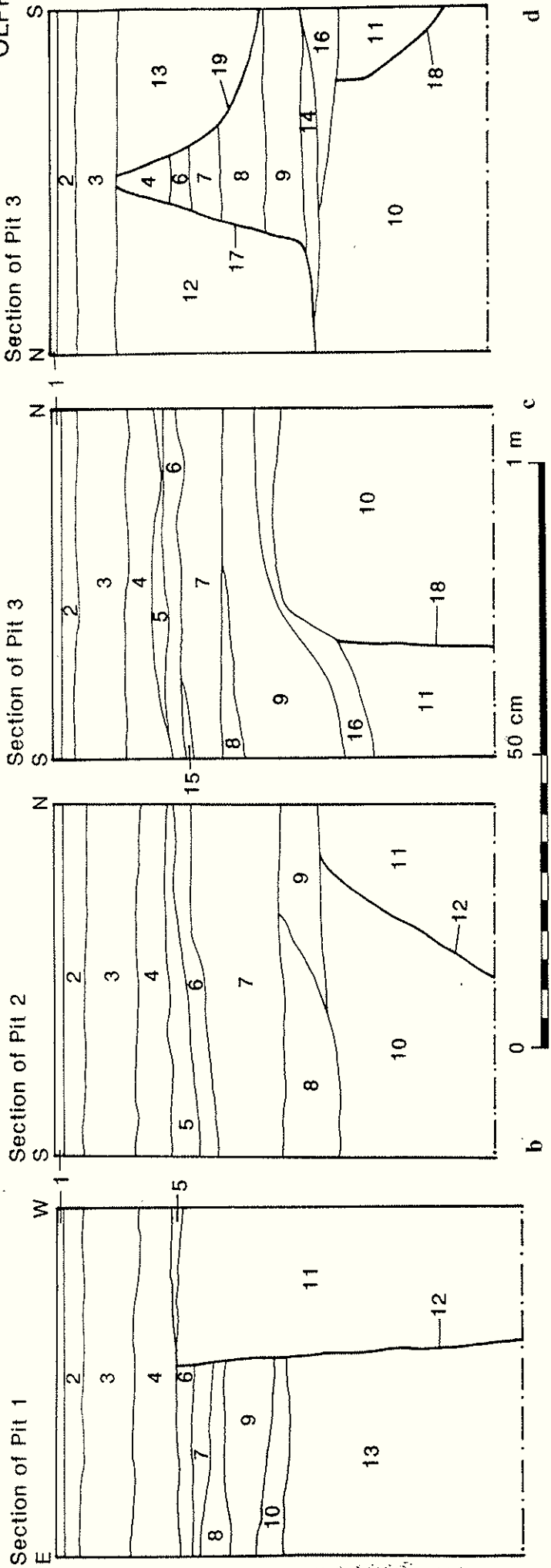


Figure 3



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 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