

Reading Borough Council

**St. Mary's Churchyard
Reading, Berkshire**

SU 714 730

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Summary

In September 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Mary's Churchyard, Reading (NGR SU 714 730), during the excavation of trenches for the installation of a new floodlighting system around the church. The project was part of the Borough Council's millennium plans. The trenches for the cabling and holes dug for the spotlights were generally shallow and no archaeological features or finds were discovered in the course of the work.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 As part of its millennium plans, Reading Borough Council planned to install floodlighting around St. Mary's Church, Reading, during the autumn of 1999 (Fig. 1). The project lasted for just over 4 weeks. The installation of the floodlights required the excavation of shallow trench runs in order to connect cabling between the floodlights, and shallow pits were dug to install the floodlights. The groundwork was undertaken by Complete Electrical Services of Surrey.
- 1.2 A watching brief was attached to the development, owing to the location of the church within the historic core of Saxon and medieval Reading. The watching brief was undertaken by OAU in accordance with the brief set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with the Babtie Group, who acted as archaeological advisors to Reading Borough Council.

2 Background

- 2.1 St Mary's Church is situated in the heart of the medieval town towards the centre of Reading. The church is bounded by St Mary's Butts to the west, Gun Street to the south and Chain Street to the east. Parts of the church date to the 12th century, while the west tower dates to the middle of the 16th century.

3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the watching brief were to record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of the cabling works. Topsoil stripping, cable trenches and other intrusive work was to be monitored for the presence of features and finds.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The Watching Brief consisted of monitoring of all ground works, including surface stripping, and excavation for the cable trenches by an archaeological supervisor working in accordance with the contractors' programme.
- 4.2 Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the trenches were cleaned, inspected and recorded. Written records were made on pro-forma sheets and colour and black and white photographs were taken. Recording was undertaken in accordance with standard OAU practices (OAU 1992).

5 Results (Fig. 2)

- 5.1 At the north side of the church the cable trench was excavated along the edges of the block paving surrounding the church and along the edge of a tarmac path at its east end. The trench was 0.5 m deep and 0.5 m wide. The lower deposit revealed was a 0.4 m thick layer of grey clay loam with few gravel inclusions. It was overlain by the present topsoil that was 0.1 m thick.
- 5.2 The trench extended around the east end of the church linking to small sockets dug for the installation of the spotlights. These socket holes were usually c 0.3 m deep and were cut through the topsoil and the underlying churchyard soil revealed elsewhere.
- 5.3 At the south side of the church the trench dimensions remained constant throughout and the only finds comprised two modern chicken bones impressed into the topsoil.
- 5.4 At the west side of the church occasional lumps of tarmac were observed in the topsoil and at the interface between the topsoil and the underlying layer. No features or finds were reported.
- 5.5 The main trench run was completed at the north end of the church where pieces of tarmac and occasional brick fragments were observed in the topsoil and the underlying layer, which remained a consistent deposit around the length of the excavation.
- 5.6 Finally trenches of 0.3 m depth were excavated to link the spotlights to the main cable trench. These were cut through deposits already observed.
- 5.7 A number of additional spotlights were added to the scheme - 3 further holes were excavated in a graveyard plot north of the church, although these only impacted on the topsoil and a similar layer to that already noted elsewhere. No features, finds nor human remains were encountered during the course of the excavations.

6 Finds

- 6.1 No finds were recovered during the course of the excavations. The modern artefacts, where observed, were not retained for analysis.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 The low level of intrusion into the area of the churchyard during this project means that no new information concerning the church was obtained.

Contexts observed

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Layer	0.1 m	Topsoil
2	Layer	0.4 m	Top of the churchyard soil

Reference

OAU 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual (Wilkinson, D, ed)



Scale 1:1250

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Figure 1: Site location

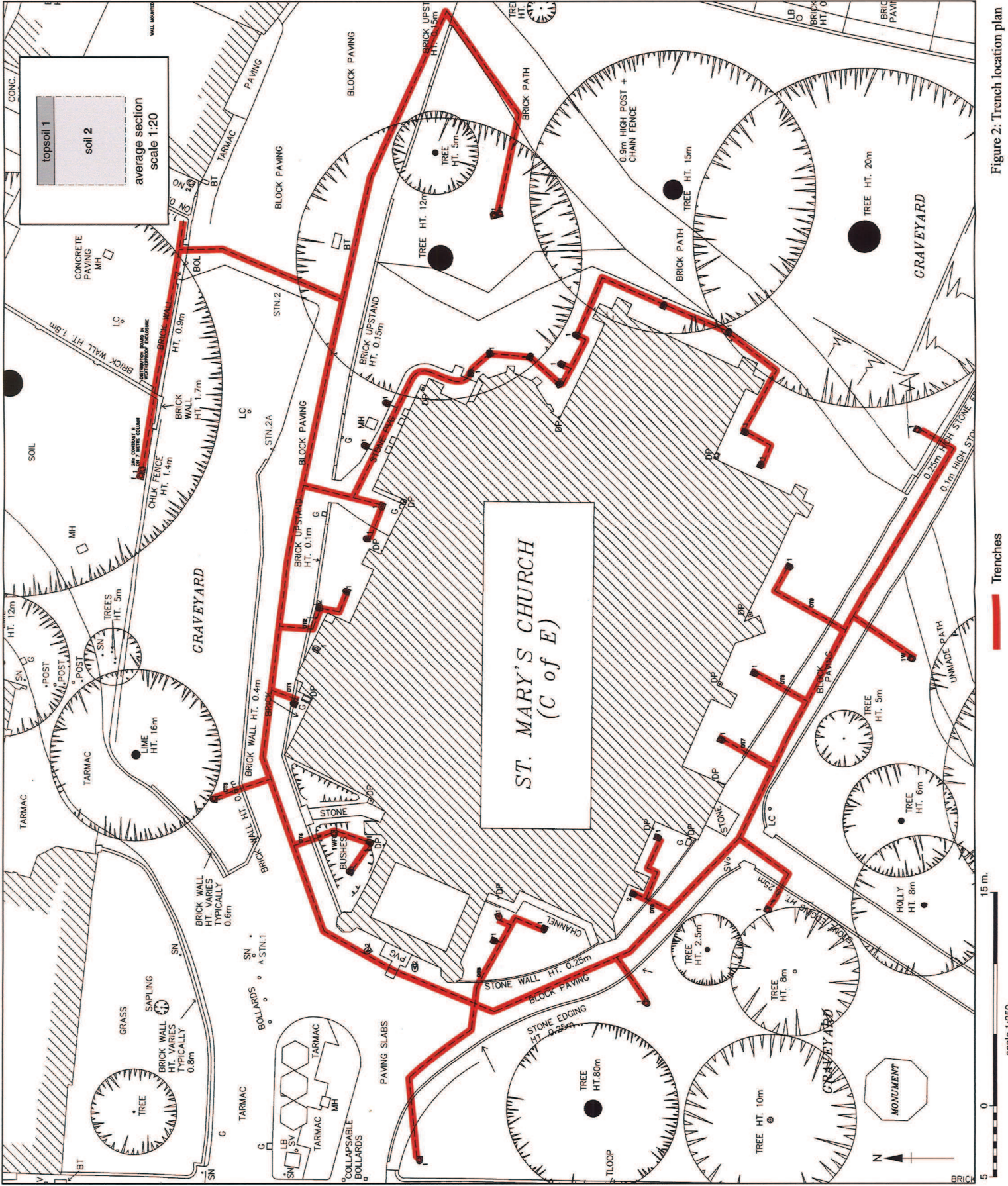


Figure 2: Trench location plan

Trenches

15 m.

scale 1:250