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PITSM 04

PITSTONE

St Mary the Virgin's Church  
Pitstone  
Buckinghamshire



**Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report**



**Oxford Archaeology**

January 2005

**Client: The Church Conservation  
Trust**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1

OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 2418

NGR: SP 942 149

**Client Name:** The Church Conservation Trust

**Client Ref No:**

**Document Title:** St Mary's the Virgin Church, Pitstone, Buckinghamshire

**Document Type:** Watching Brief

**Issue Number:** 1


National Grid Reference: NGR SP 942 149  
Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 2418  
Site Code: PITSM 04  
Invoice Code: PITSMWB  
Receiving Museum: Buckinghamshire County Museum  
Museum Accession No: AYBCM:2004.127

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Document File Location :/OAU/wbREPORTS/Buckinghamshire/PITSM.doc  
Graphics File Location Server 10:/oaupubs1 ItoQ\*PITSM04\*PITSMWB\*St  
Mary's Church, Pitstone, Buckinghamshire\*GS\*23.12.04

Illustrated by Georgina Slater

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**St Mary's the Virgin Church, Pitstone, Buckinghamshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

Summary.....	1
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Location and scope of work .....	1
1.2 Geology and topography .....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background .....	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	1
2.1 Aims .....	1
2.2 Methodology.....	1
3 Results .....	2
3.1 Description of deposits .....	2
3.2 Finds .....	3
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains .....	3
4 Discussion and Conclusions .....	3
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory .....	4
Appendix 2 Bibliography and References .....	4
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details.....	4

**LIST OF FIGURES**

- Fig. 1 Site location  
 Fig. 2 Site location showing route of French drain  
 Fig. 3 Plan of church showing location of sections  
 Fig. 4 Sections 1 and 2

Cover Plate: View of church from the south-east.

## SUMMARY

*On the 15th December 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's the Virgin Church, Pitstone, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 942 149). The work was commissioned by The Church Conservation Trust in advance of the installation of a new French drain and renovation works in the church. The watching brief revealed a number of graves and a in-filled window in the chancel.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 On the 15th December 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's the Virgin Church, Pitstone, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by The Church Conservation Trust (CCT) in respect of the installation of a new French drain and renovation works in the church.

1.1.2 OA worked to a program of works produced by Carden & Godfrey Architects for the renovation works carried out in the church in line with Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service requirements.

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The church is situated to the south-east of the village of Pitstone. The site lies on the dip slope of the Chilterns on Lower Chalk at 125 m above OD.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The church dates from the late 12th century with the oldest part being the north arcade of the chancel. In the early 15th century the church passed to the Ashridge College and a major program of building and improvements was carried out. This was in the form of lengthening the chancel and the addition of the vestry. New windows were also added to the chancel. Following these works and with funding from the parish the tower was added and the nave remodelled with a new windows, rood stairs and a squint.

1.3.2 In the 16th century pews were added to the church. During the Reformation Ashridge College became a royal residence and the patronage passed to a Richard Snowe. In 1552 the vestments, silver hangings and candle sticks were removed by Royal Commissioners of boy King, Edward VI, followed by the puritanical Commissioners under Queen Elizabeth I who removed the wooden screens, rood loft and alters. Following this during the 17th century the church remain fell into disrepair with only the occasional repair to the building and furnishings.

1.3.3 In 1684 Pitstone and Ivinghoe parishes were united and the church came under the control of the vestry. In the 19th century the industrial revolution brought economic and social change to the local area. This bought life back into the church with regular services and a Sunday school for the local children. In 1827-30 a great programme of works was carried out on the church with repairs to the walls, buttresses and

battlements and the outside of the church walls were covered in cement render. In 1879 the south porch was rebuilt and later the church was re-decorated and the graveyard extended. By 1947 the parishes of Ivinghoe and Pitstone were reunited under one vicar and in 1973 the church became redundant and passed into the hands of The Church Conservation Trust (CCT 1975 and Pevsner 1960).

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The trench for the French drain was excavated by hand along the south chancel wall of the church. From the south-east corner the trench narrowed and extended for another 14 m down the slope and curved towards the north. This was archaeologically monitored and a section was drawn along the church wall. Within the church the plaster had been removed from the south wall of the chancel and the exposed stone work was recorded in elevation.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Field Manual* (OAU 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

#### *French Drain*

- 3.1.1 The front drain was excavated along the outside of the south wall of the chancel. It measured 11.5 m long by 1.2 m wide and 0.7 m in depth and cut into a disturbed graveyard soil (2) of light grey silty clay loam with chalk and flint inclusions. Deposit 2 had been cut by a grave (11), which measured 0.7 m x 0.28 m x 0.7 m and was filled by a dark grey brown silty clay loam (7). This had been cut by graves (5) aligned east to west along the south wall of the church, which partly exposed in section. This measured 2.1 m x 0.15 m x 0.7 m and was filled by a light grey-brown silty clay loam (6) overlain by a foot stone, half rounded cylinder body stones and a head stone with an inscription to 'Ann wife of James Stevens, died 1811'. To the east of this was another grave (3) partly exposed in section and measured 1 m x 0.04 m x 0.7 m. It was filled by a dark grey-brown silty clay (4) with remains of a brick body stone and concrete repair on top.

- 3.1.2 At the west end of the service trench the church wall foundation trench (8) was partly exposed. This had vertical sides, although the base was not exposed during excavation. The foundation trench (8) cut through grave fill (7) and contained the foundations (10) of limestone and chalk blocks with flint nodule bonded with a light yellow-brown sandy mortar. This formed a 0.3 m wide offset to the wall face and was sealed below a light brown and grey-brown silty clay backfill (9). All these features had been sealed below a 0.15 m thick layer of very dark grey-brown silty clay loam topsoil (1), which had been cut by the earlier French drain that ran around the base of the church wall.
- 3.1.3 The south-east corner of the service trench narrowed to 0.5 m wide by 0.5 m deep and extended for a further 14.6 m. This stretch of trench cut through the topsoil (1) into the disturbed graveyard soil (2). No grave cuts were observed in the trench.

### *South Chancel Wall*

- 3.1.4 The present plaster on the interior of the south chancel wall had been removed and exposed the window sills of the three 15th century windows. The eastern most window had originally a lower sill, which was 0.6 m below the present window sill. This had been bricked up in the 19th century using bricks (0.22 m x 0.1 m x 0.08 m) laid in a Flemish running bond with an off white sandy mortar. This was so the window level matched the other two windows in the chancel. Two round socket holes were observed in the stone window frame 0.3 m below the present sill. The scar for the larger window was observed in the outer wall face which had been filled with flint nodules to match rest of wall.

## 3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

## 3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

## 4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The watching brief recorded a number of features that were exposed during the present phase of works to the church. These were the partially bricked up eastern window in the south chancel, which was originally taller than the other two chancel windows, having a lower sill. The two sockets on each side of the window frame were probably for fittings each side of the window or across it. This window allowed more light into the altar area at the east end and was probably constructed at the bequest of a private benefactor. The window was later filled in to match the other two windows during the early 19th century renovation work to the church.
- 4.1.2 The new French drain ran along the outer face of the south chancel wall. The old French drain and present works had removed any stratigraphic relationship with the wall, even though the foundation trench for the wall was exposed. It revealed that the wall was trench built with only a small offset towards its east end of the wall. Also

exposed were the original 15th century buttress foundations of chalk and flint nodules with a sandy mortar bond, below the early 19th century rebuilt buttress's built straight off these at 0.2m below the ground surface in brick and stone. Two early 19th century graves (3 and 5) were exposed alongside this wall. Grave 5 dated to 1811 and cut an earlier grave at the west end, which had been cut by the foundation trench for the 15th century nave, abutting the south chancel wall.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.15 m			Topsoil	
2	Layer	0.55 m			Graveyard soil	
3	Cut	0.55 m	0.04 m	1.1 m	Grave	19th Century
4	Fill				Grave fill of 3	19th Century
5	Cut	0.55 m	0.15 m	2.2 m	Grave	19th Century
6	Fill				Grave fill of 5	19th Century
7	Fill				Grave fill of 11	poss 15th Century
8	Cut	0.4 m	0.35 m	1.1 m	15th C foundation trench	15th Century
9	Fill				Backfill	15th Century
10	Structure				East wall of nave	15th Century
11	Cut	0.5 m	0.28 m	0.7 m	Grave	15th Century

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

1960 Nikolaus Pevsner *The buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*

CCT 1975 *Pitstone Church* by J. C. Comben

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** St Mary's the Virgin Church, Pitstone, Buckinghamshire

**Site code:** PITSM 04

**Grid reference:** NGR SP 942 149

**Type of watching brief:** Monitoring of new French drain and building recording in chancel.

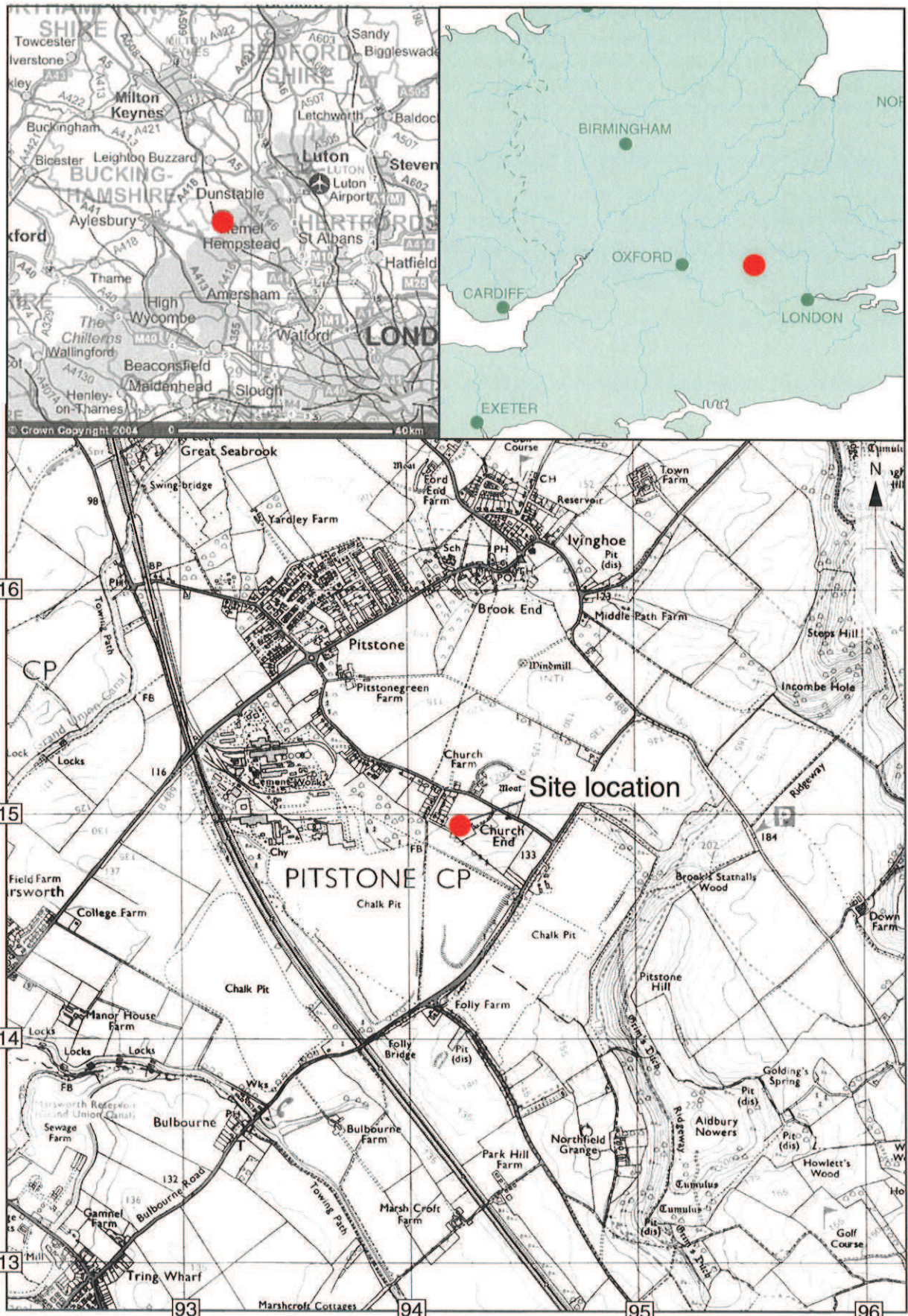
**Date and duration of project:** One site visit on the 15/12/2004.

**Area of site:** 36 m long x 1 m to 0.5 m wide and 0.7 - .5 m in depth.

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed a number of graves and a in-filled window in the chancel.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: ABYCM:2004.127





Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



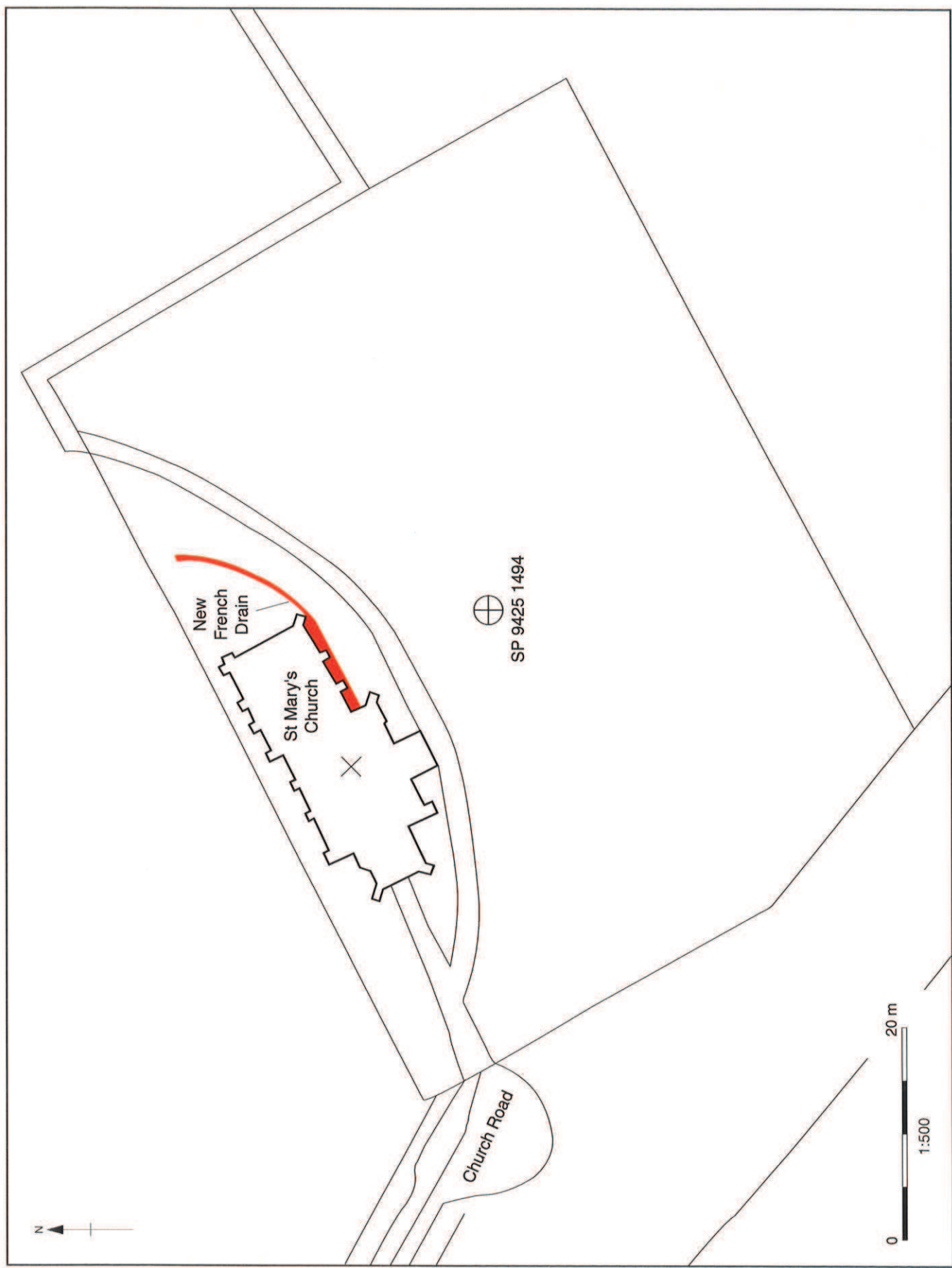


Figure 2: Site location showing route of French drain

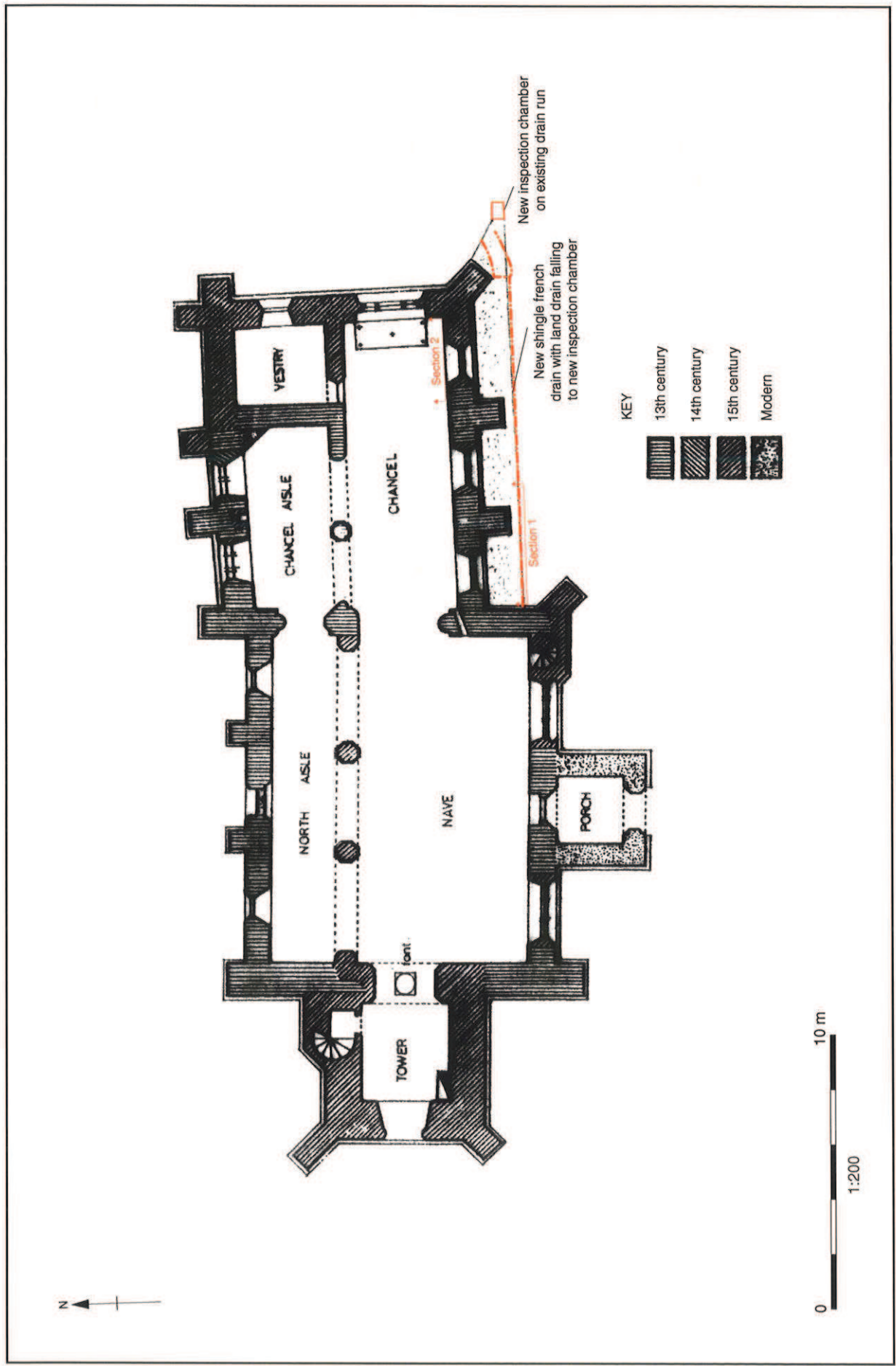
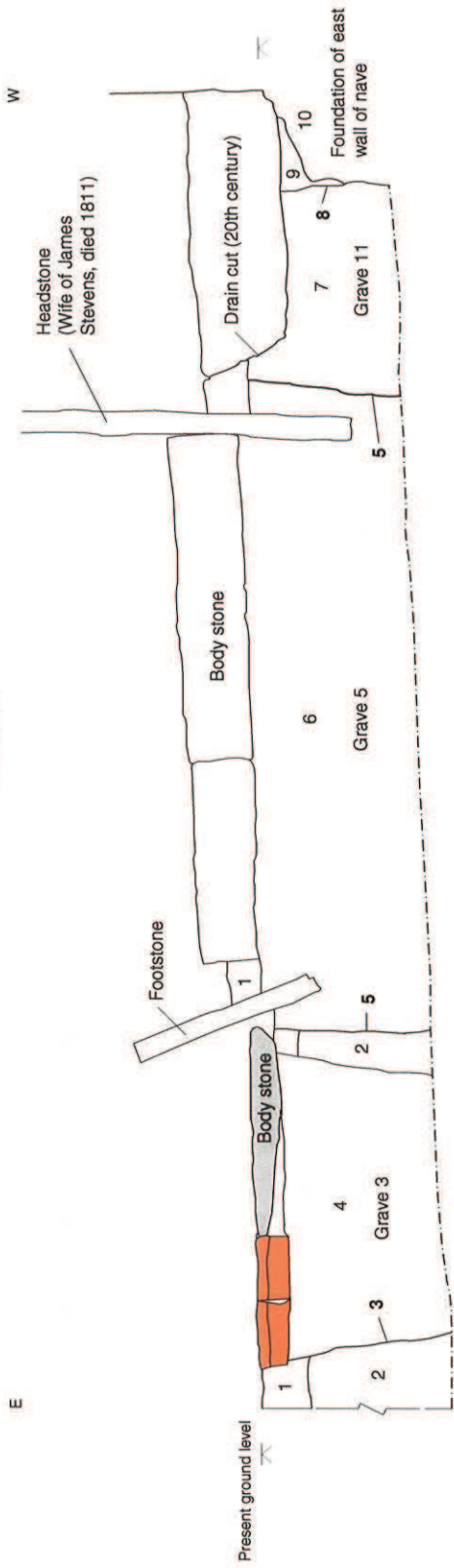


Figure 3: Plan of church showing location of sections

### Section 1



### Section 2

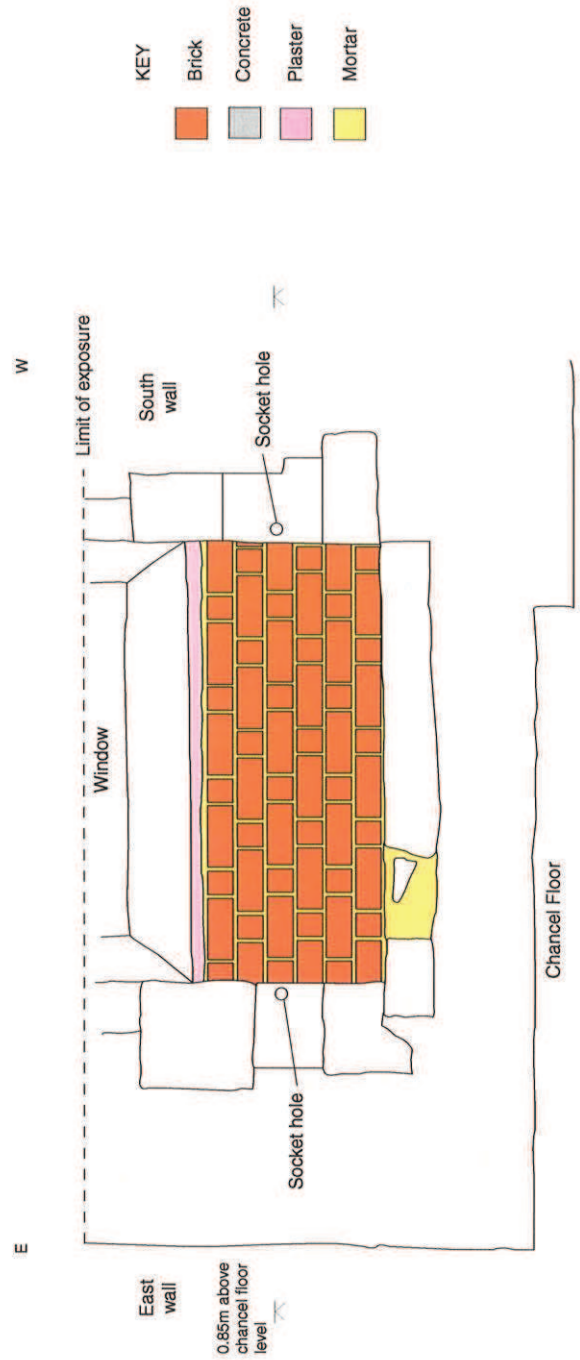


Figure 4: Sections 1 and 2



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