

Binfield Church, Berkshire

Archaeological evaluation

by the

Oxford Archaeological Unit

An archaeological investigation was carried out just outside the church in advance of the construction of a toilet block. The affected area is situated E of the choir vestry and is contained between the clergy vestry and the chancel of the church. There were two coffin slabs in this area, both lying E-W up against the wall of the choir vestry, which it was thought might be in situ with graves underneath. When these were lifted however this proved not to be the case.

Beneath the more northerly slab was a layer of post-medieval topsoil 0.2 m deep, overlying a mixed layer of clay, brick and mortar fragments 0.25 m deep. A total of 4 very small bone fragments, all redeposited, were recovered from this second layer. Clean clay was found at 0.45 m down; this was excavated by hand to a depth of 1.8 m, but contained no finds, and was clearly undisturbed subsoil.

Beneath the southern slab was the topsoil, but this came down onto the dome of a brick vault, which contained three burials in lead coffins and decorated outer wooden coffins. When first opened the vault contained more than 0.8 m of water, which had preserved the wood of the outer coffins. This water contained freshwater shrimps and was clearly ground water. The vault lay E-W and was 2.45 m long by 1.55 - 1.60 m wide internally; 1.64 m of the vault lay outside the church, 0.81 m lay inside the outer face of the E wall of the choir vestry, and the vault had originally been entered from within the church at the W end. The bricked-up entrance through which the last of the three coffins had been inserted was visible in the W wall (see elevation).

The dome of the vault was constructed of a double layer of mortared bricks with a total thickness of just over 0.2 m, and the maximum height from the floor of the vault to the ceiling of the dome was 1.6 m. Where the vault passed underneath the E wall of the church the church wall was supported upon a further brick arch 0.2 m (two bricks) thick. The N and S side walls were 1 m high to the bottom of the springing of the vault arch. These walls were not further investigated, but the E end wall was removed to facilitate the removal of the coffins. Up to the springing of the vault arch this was constructed of a single thickness of bricks laid as 'headers', that is end on to the vault, and was 0.2 m wide. Above this level it reduced in thickness to 0.10 m, and was constructed of half bricks, which were not mortared onto the vault arch.

The floor of the vault was of stone, but it was too filthy to be more precise as to the material. Upon this three lines of bricks lying end on ran across the vault floor, one towards each end and one across the middle, upon which the lower two coffins lay side by side. These were presumably simply to prevent the coffins from lying directly on the floor.

Two of the coffins rested side by side upon these bricks, the third lay upon the more southerly of these two. The coffins

were dated 1807, 1809 and 1830. The coffins were planned and photographed, but no detailed recording was undertaken before they were lifted upon specially constructed wooden platforms and reburied.

With the exception of the recessed areas on the N and S flanked by the projecting buttresses, the vault and recent archaeological excavations have cleared the entire area of the proposed toilet block to a depth of at least 0.6 m, and over most of this area to a depth of over 1.5 m. No archaeological features earlier than the brick vault have been encountered.

NOTE: During clearance of the soil overlying the vault a tile drain was found running ENE across the SE corner at a depth of 0.4 m. This was probably connected with rainwater drainage. It was removed to facilitate the removal of the coffins.

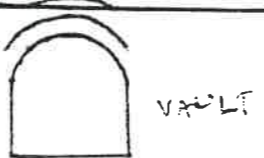
OAU
8th April 1993

SECTION

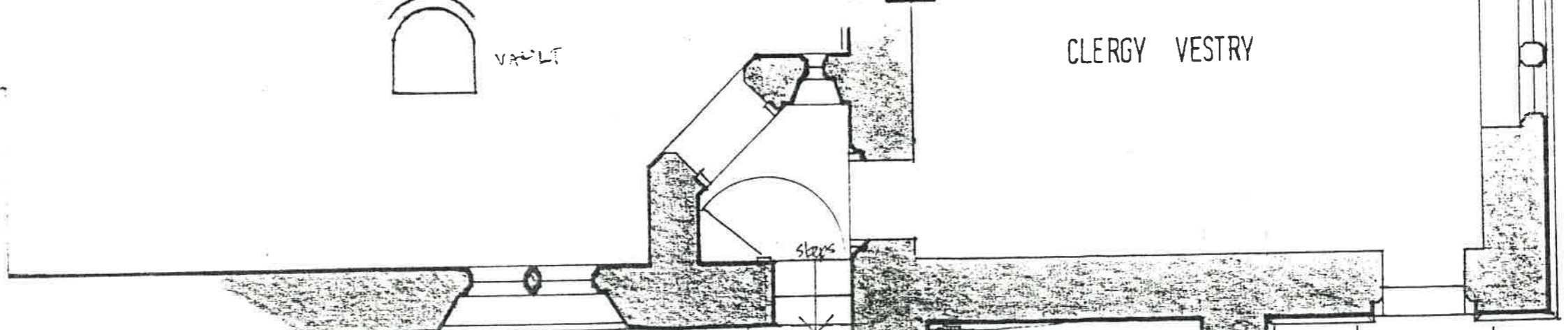
stone slabs



EAST ELEVATION



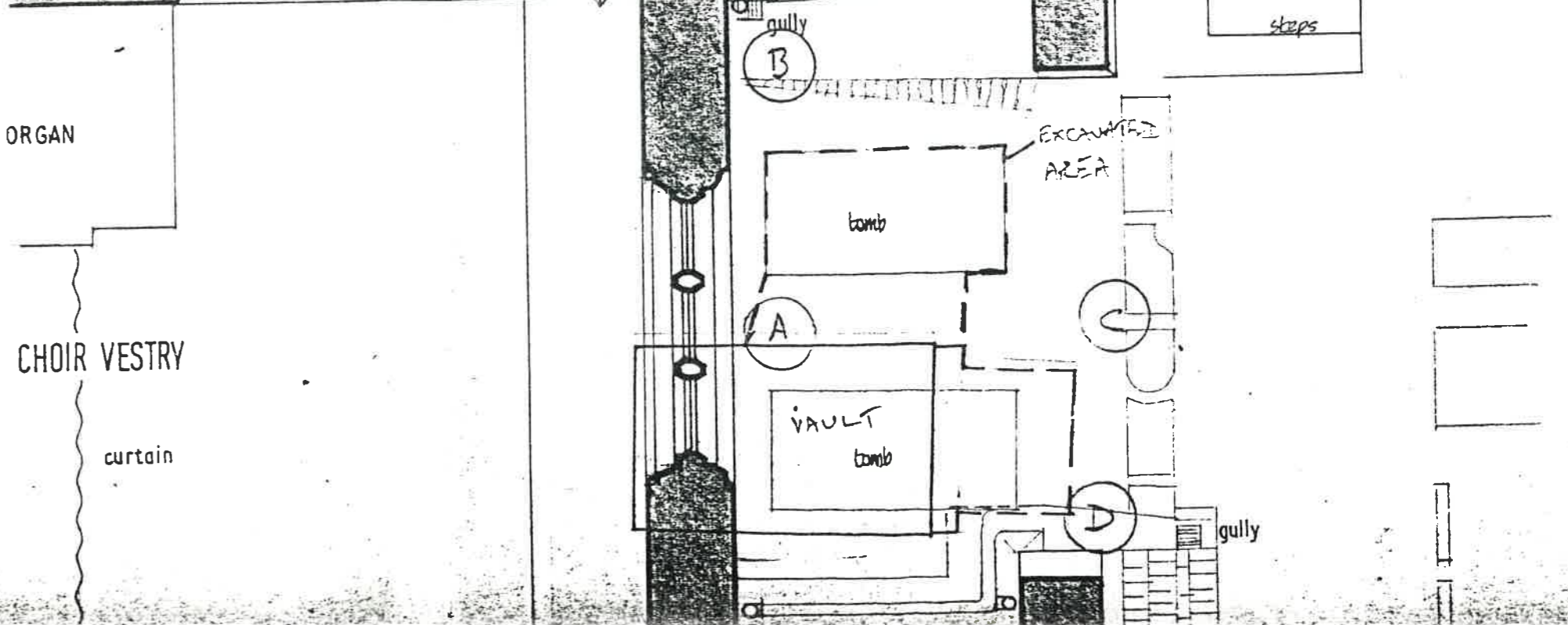
CLERGY VESTRY



ORGAN

CHOIR VESTRY

curtain



gully B

A

VAULT tomb

EXCAVATED AREA

tomb

C

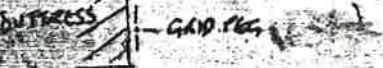
D

gully

BADAS 93

SKETCH PLAN 1:20 6-4-95

N ←



BRICK SIZE (VARIABLE) 0.22 x 0.107 x 0.67 M.

Brickwork generally no below through vault



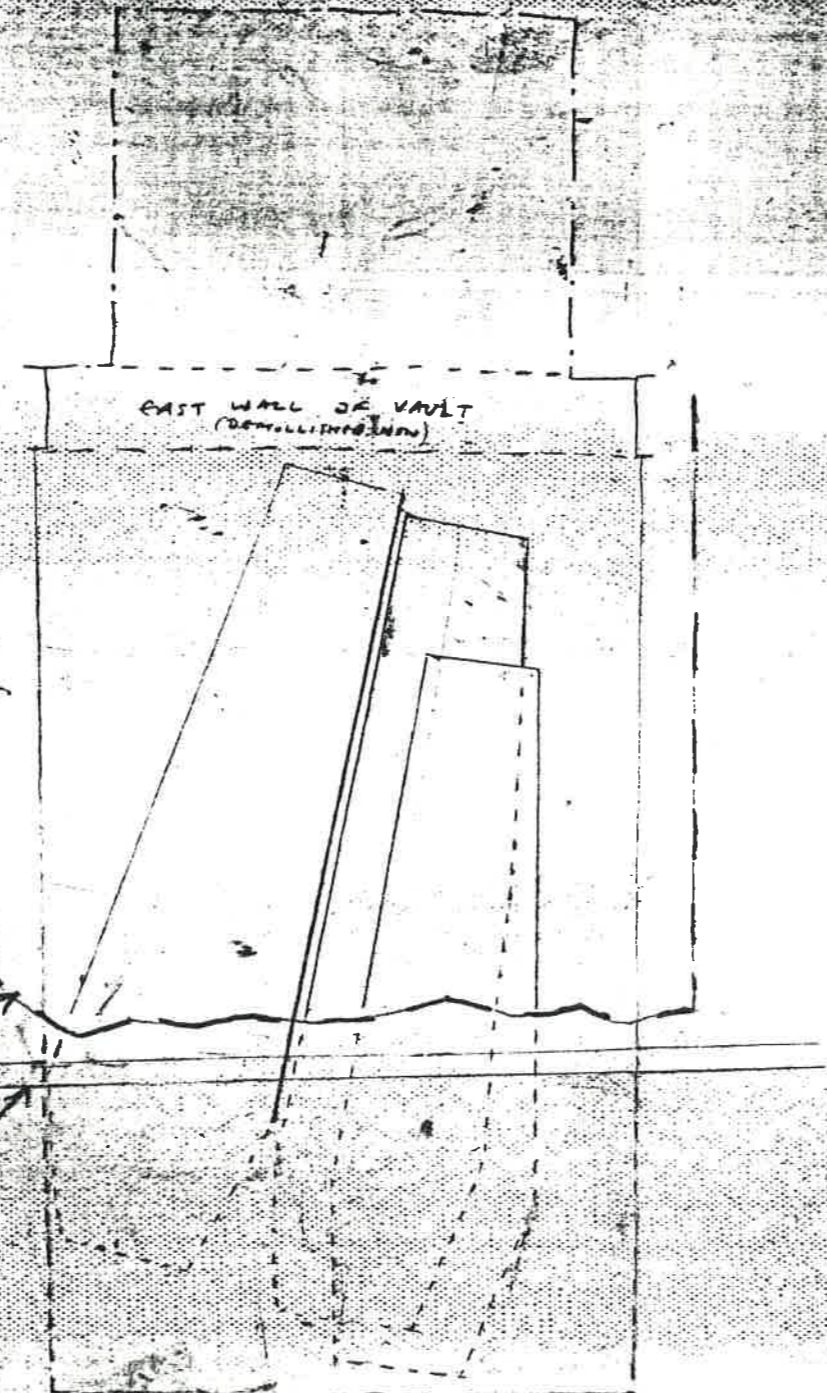
EAST WALL OF VAULT (DEMOLISHED NOW)

BREACH THROUGH VAULT

FOUNDATION

SECTION

OUTER FACE OF CHURCH WALL



LETTERS OF WINDOW ANTEPIES



FLINT FACING



S

SLAB

TOPSOIL

MIXED SANDY CLAY, BRICK, POTTER

UNDISTURBED CLAY

N

RELIEVING ARCH

VAULT ROOF

VAULT FLOOR

