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All Saints' Church, Gt. Bourton, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 456455

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

July 1995

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, GREAT BOURTON, OXON.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) conducted a watching brief at All Saints Church, Great Bourton, Oxon, during the installation of a water and drainage supply to the vestry. The work entailed the excavation of a single trench, incorporating two manholes, across the N side of the churchyard.

The architects for the work were Clews Architects, of Great Bourton, and the contractors were P.R. Alcock & Son, of Banbury.

The OAU visited the site on June 21st 1995, and monitored the final stages of the excavation.

Historical Background

The church is originally of the 13th century. During the 16th century it fell victim to neglect and desecration and was abandoned for worship. The nave became a schoolhouse, and the chancel served as a schoolroom and later a grocer's shop.

In 1863 the church was largely rebuilt by William White, who also constructed the eccentric Gothic lychgate in the churchyard.

With the exception of the W wall of the nave, very little of the original fabric survives.

Results Fig 1.

The trench averaged 0.30 m wide and approximately 0.70 m deep. There is a gentle slope down to the N of the churchyard, which steepens markedly near the boundary wall, hence the fairly uniform depth of the trench from the existing ground surface.

Natural sandy clay subsoil (4), with occasional inclusions of cornbrash, was just revealed in the S manhole. This was overlaid by (3), a layer of compact mid grey brown silty clay, with inclusions of lighter yellowish brown clay, flecks of charcoal and small cornbrash fragments.

Overlying (3), and identified in the section of the S part of the trench, was a layer of mixed pale yellow silty clay, decayed mortar and small stone and tile fragments

(2). This layer was up to 0.20 m deep close to the vestry wall, and extended up to 4 m northwards from it.

Sealing both (2) and (3) was the modern turf/topsoil (1) averaging 0.15 m deep. No archaeologically significant artifacts were recovered from the excavated material. There was no evidence of grave cuts, nor was any human bone identified during the watching brief.

Conclusion

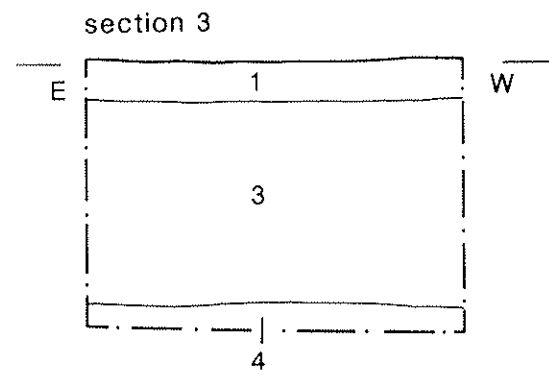
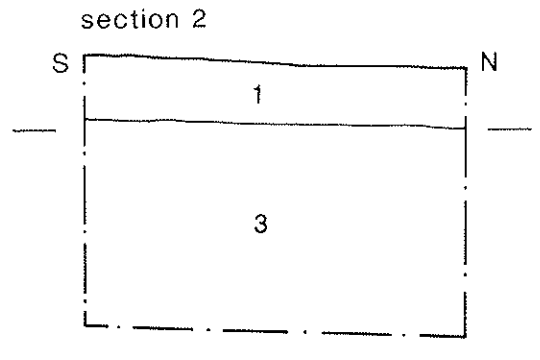
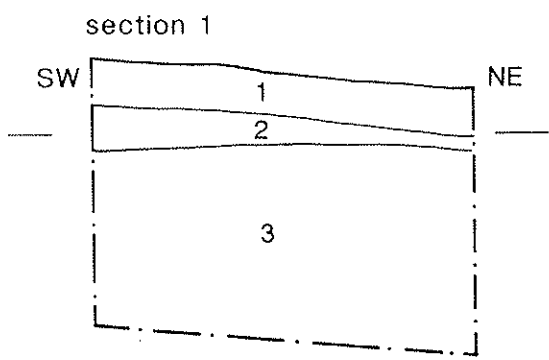
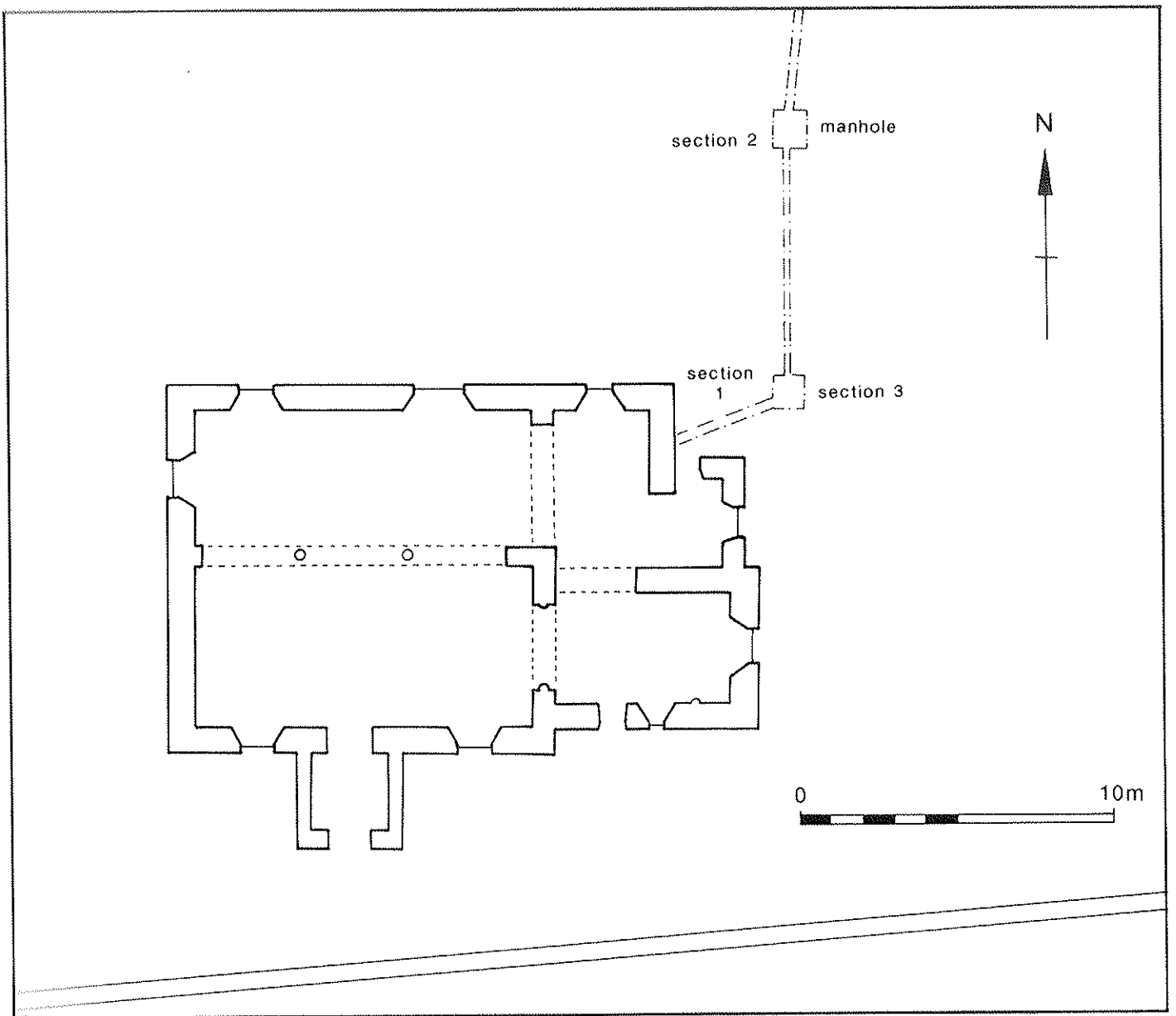
The lack of evidence of grave cuts is not necessarily unusual. For reasons of climate, in the medieval period the colder, damper N side of a church, and by implication, the N side of the churchyard, were considered less 'holy', and wherever possible the S part of the churchyard was favoured for burial.

However, the deep layer of soil (3) is characteristic of material excavated for burials elsewhere and subsequently spread evenly over the churchyard.

Layer (2) presumably represents the construction debris associated with the major rebuilding of the church in 1863.

It is reasonable to conclude that no part of the earlier church extended NE of the present building.

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