

Ashendon PCC

St Mary's Church, Ashendon, Buckinghamshire

NGR SP 7050 1425

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF INTERIM
REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 1999

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Mary's Church, Ashendon, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 7050 1425), during the installation of new drainage facilities around the exterior base of the church. No archaeological features were seen; a destruction deposit resulting from the demolition of the previous Victorian brick-built drainage gully around the base of the tower was examined for finds, with one piece of post-medieval brick being retained.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

Work at St Mary's Church, Ashendon, Buckinghamshire was monitored by the OAU during 1997. The church was being renovated with the aid of a grant from English Heritage: the west tower has been re-pointed and the parapet on top of the tower has been rebuilt. New drainage was required for the building owing to the ineffective nature of a Victorian brick-built gully, which surrounded much of the structure.

The work monitored to date involved the removal of the brick gully followed by the installation of new drainage pipes, including a new system of french drains around the base of the west tower. All trench excavation was monitored for the presence of features and finds. All groundwork was undertaken by contractors Bowden and Ward, working to plans devised by architect Peter Gilbert Scott, RIBA AAdipl. This watching brief report is an interim document pending resumption and completion of the works.

2 Background

The village of Ashendon is located in the centre-west of Buckinghamshire, in the Vale of Aylesbury. Ashendon Hundred is mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Survey, although there is very little known history of the village itself.

St Mary's Church dates to the Norman period and is situated on high ground within the village, with views south-east towards the Vale (see Fig. 1). Norman masonry is visible in the fabric of the north side of the building, where there is also a blocked Norman doorway. The Norman nave and the south side of the building were lengthened in c. AD 1200. Evidence for a north transept is visible in the north wall of the building; the chancel dates to the early 19th-century (Pevsner 1960, 52).

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits. All excavation was by hand, and was undertaken by the main contractor.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits 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 description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Figs 2 & 3)

The West Tower.

The remaining portion of the Victorian brick drain was removed by the contractors from around the base of the west tower footings. At the base of the resulting trench was a layer of mid-dark brown sandy loam (104=105), which contained mortar, modern metal objects, broken and whole bricks and modern glass. The deposit was up to 0.5 m thick and overlay the offset footing beneath the north and south walls of the tower. The offset comprised roughly hewn limestone blocks bonded with grey mortar, and the stonework projected 0.12 m away from the wall faces. Above the offset was the wall of the tower (101), constructed of large blocks of limestone, which included two buttresses at each corner. A course of chamfered ashlar was incorporated into the wall, this being 0.4 m above present ground level. Two buttresses had been built against the north wall of the church; the date of these additions is unknown. Topsoil (103) overlay layer 104=105 and abutted the wall and buttresses.

6 Finds

One brick was retained as a representative sample of those which comprised the Victorian drain; it will be retained pending further work at the church.

7 Environmental results

Due to the absence of any significant archaeological deposits, no environmental soil samples were taken.

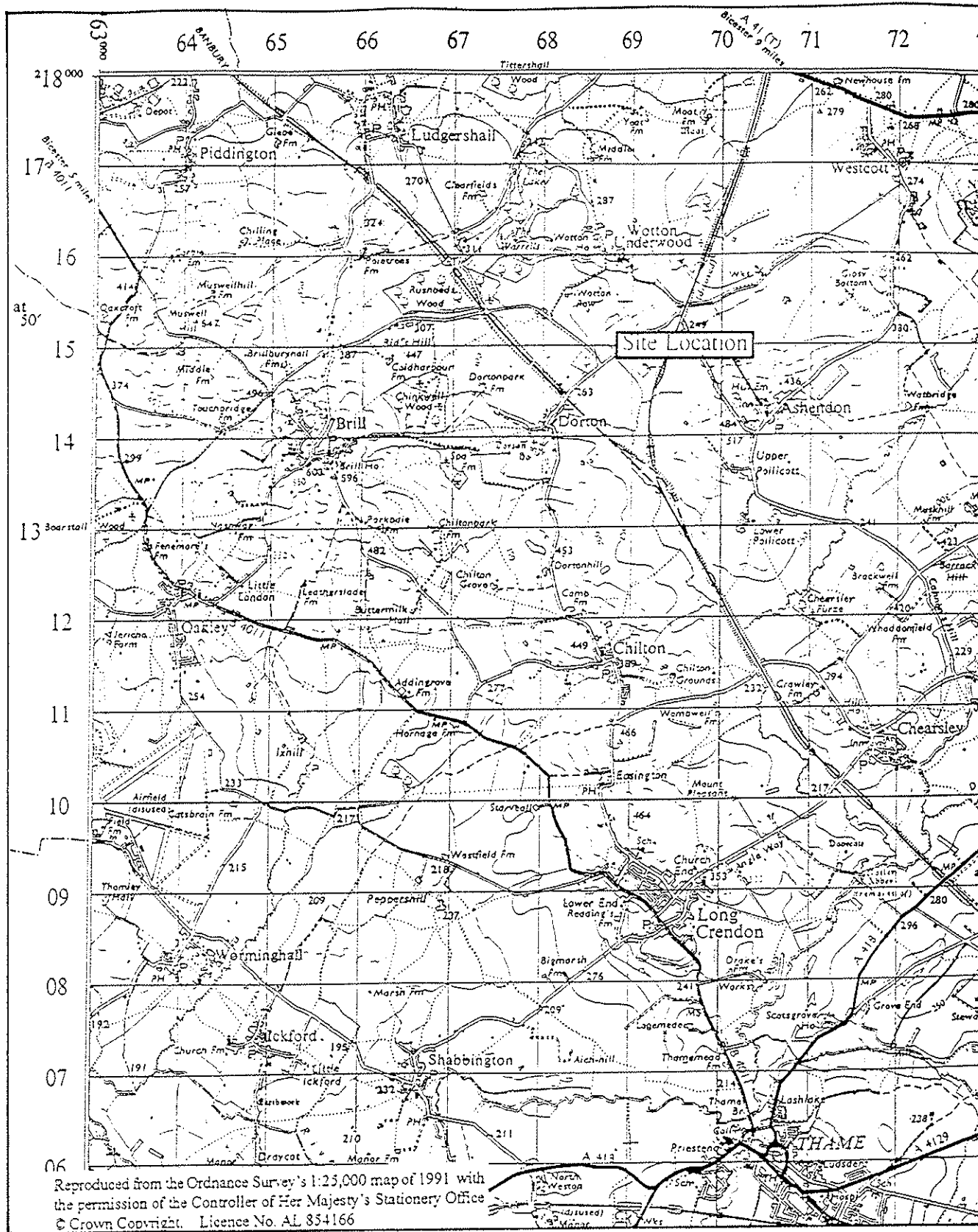
8 Discussion

At this stage the watching brief has not identified archaeology of any significance beyond the Victorian drain already known to be *in situ*; any conclusions must remain pending until completion of the works.

References.

Pevsner, N. 1960 *The Buildings of England* Penguin Books.

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



Location of site

Scale 1:250,000

Figure 1

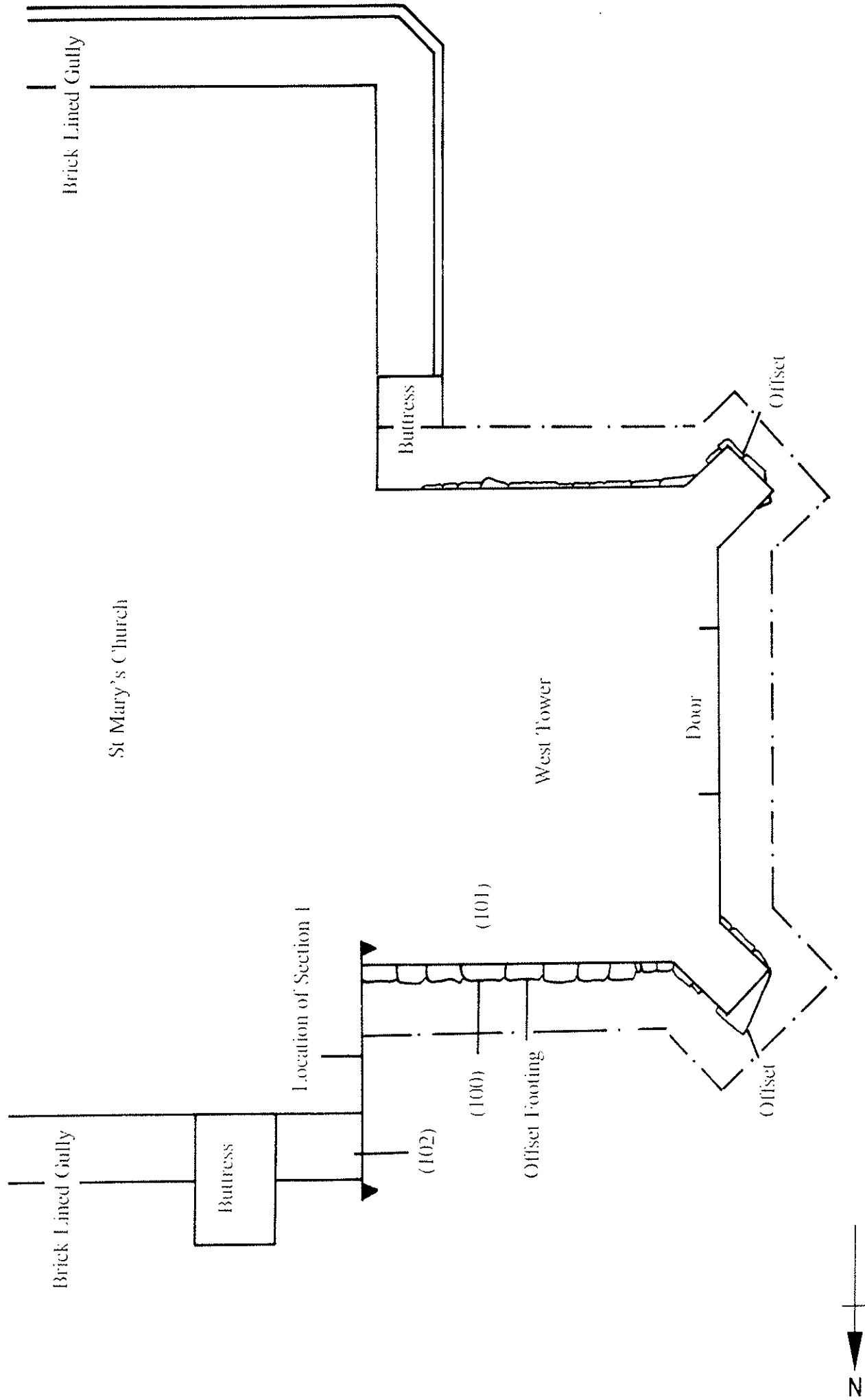


Figure 2: Site Plan and Section Location Scale 1:50

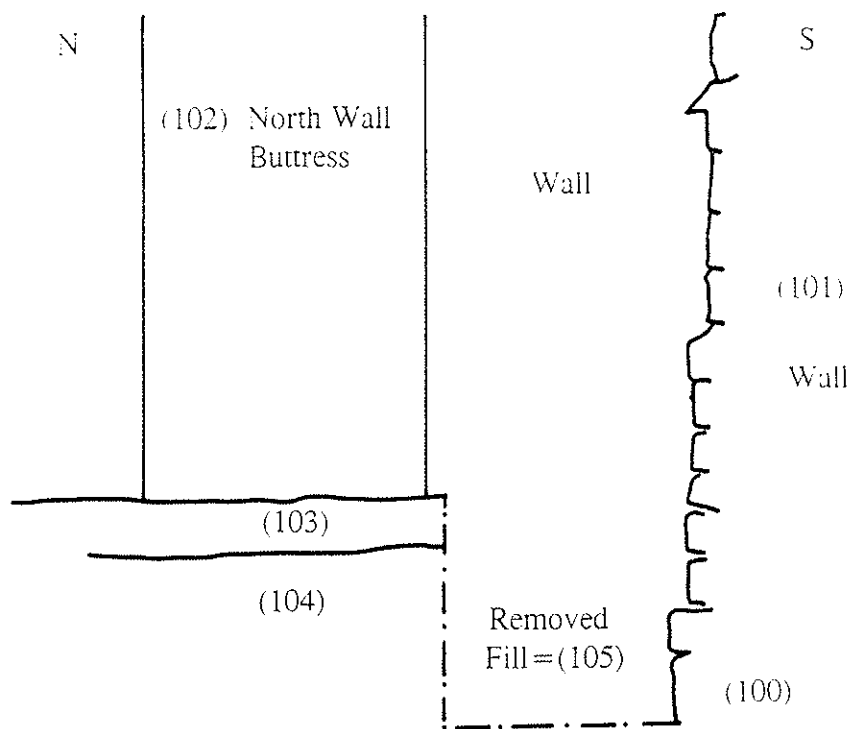


Figure 3: Section 1

Scale 1:20



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