

Mr J R B Thornhill

**The Church of St Mary and St Nicholas, Chetwode,
Buckinghamshire**

NGR SP 6405 2983

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT



Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1998

Mr J R B Thornhill

The Church of St Mary and St Nicholas, Chetwode,
Buckinghamshire

NGR SP 6405 2983

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared by:

John Duff

Date:

13/6/98

Checked by:

Anna Duff

Date:

23/6/98

Approved by:

R. Williams

HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date:

25/6/98

Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1998

Summary

In May 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the Church of St Mary and St Nicholas, Chetwode, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 6405 2983). No buried archaeology was seen. The removal of Tudor wooden panelling from the chapel walls revealed a possibly medieval double-niched piscina, diagonally opposite two blocked doorways.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal comprised the removal of a suspended wooden floor, and its supporting joists, in the north chapel and the reduction of the underlying material by approximately 0.15 m prior to the installation of a new suspended floor. The Tudor panelling was removed temporarily in order to facilitate the lifting of the floor.

The watching brief was commissioned by Mr J R B Thornhill, the churchwarden, on behalf of the church. It was undertaken in consultation with the Diocesan Advisory Committee's Archaeological Advisor, Mr David Miles.

2 Background

The church of SS Mary and Nicholas is the surviving chancel of the church of an Augustinian priory, and was built around 1240. The north chapel, subject of the watching brief, was added around 1330 and the tower was constructed around 1480. Before its demolition, the main body of the church lay between the present building and the main road through Chetwode.

St Mary and St Nicholas became the parish church of Chetwode in 1480 following the dissolution of the priory; the extant parish church, St Martin's, which stood near Chetwode Manor, had fallen into disrepair.

The church has many features of interest, but is particularly noted for its fine stained glass. The three windows at the east end of the church were originally constructed in around 1240; the stained glass in the south wall is also of 13th century date. The central lancet of this window was displayed in the Royal Academy's exhibition "The Age of Chivalry". The glass depicts St John the Baptist, a Bishop and the Arms of England, with three leopards or lions. This was a relatively simple coat of arms for King Henry III, contrasting with the intricate royal coat of arms above the entrance to the north chapel which dates to circa 1690. The two smaller lancets on either side are possibly 14th Century and St Nicholas, to whom the church is dedicated, is depicted on the right. The pinkish *grisaille* glass at the top of the left-hand lancet is thought to be a Victorian restoration. The glass was restored in 1992, partly funded with a grant from English Heritage.

The church also has surviving wall paintings believed to be of medieval date which retain some traces of colour; one behind the pulpit in a recess in the north wall and one further on the east wall below the window, mimicking that on the north wall and believed to be a Victorian copy.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

One inspection visit was made to the site by prior arrangement with the churchwarden and the main contractor; Hayward, Carey and Vinden of Bicester.

Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits and features 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 descriptions use *estimated* percentages based on the use of standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Figs 2 and 3)

The area under investigation comprised the eastern half of the north chapel, measuring c. 2.15 m east-west by 4.90 m north-south. Subsequent to the removal of the suspended wooden floor and its supporting joists, the level of the underlying material, deposit (1), was reduced by c. 0.15 m in order to allow for the insertion of a new floor and damp-proof membrane. With the exception of slate placed on the upper surfaces of the joists, no damp-proofing measures had been undertaken prior to the insertion of the original floor. The joists were in direct contact with the exterior wall, and were thus damp and had begun to rot.

(1) was a very mixed light-mid brown silty clay loam with 30% mortar, limestone and plaster fragments. This deposit was consistent both in plan and section; a sondage was dug at the south end of the chapel, revealing the same deposit to a depth of 0.50 m.

The removal of wooden panelling, dated to the Tudor period, from around the chancel walls revealed a double-niched piscina in the south wall of the chapel (see Fig. 4). Carved from a single block of limestone it measured approximately 1 m in height by 1.5 m in width. It consisted of two niches under an arch, which featured an incised foliate design at its apex; the right hand niche contained a small foliate reservoir in its base. This feature was set into the limestone block wall of the chapel and appeared to be *in situ*; the wall was plastered at the base level of this feature, which coincided with the upper horizon of deposit (1), along its length between the eastern outer wall and the vault, to the west. The sondage demonstrated that the plastering continued to a depth of at least 0.50 m.

The removal of the Tudor panelling also revealed the presence of one, and possibly two, blocked doorways in the east wall of the chapel diagonally opposite the piscina, neither of which was clearly visible on the exterior of the church.

6 Discussion

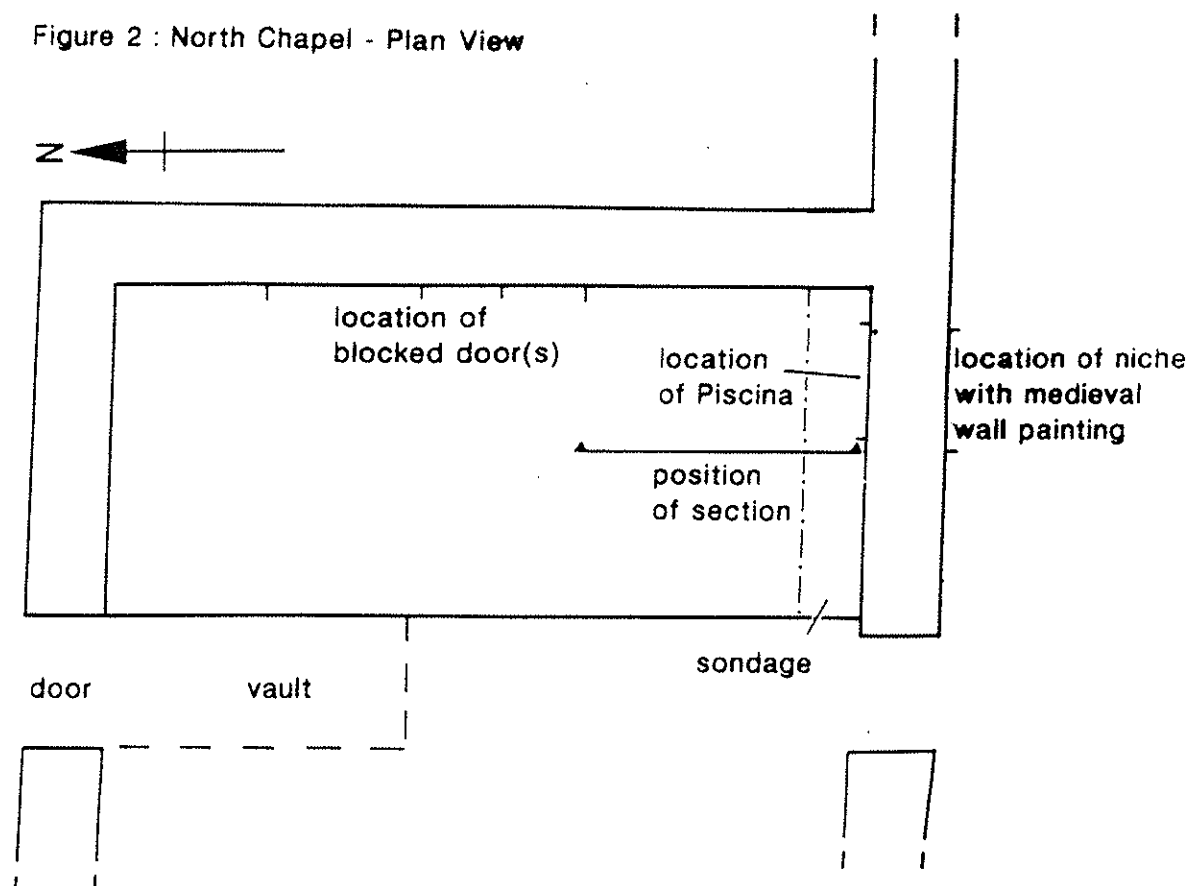
Deposit (1) is thought to represent backfill, probably deposited immediately prior to the insertion of the previous suspended wooden floor. No cut features were detected within it and it produced no artefactual material of any kind.

The piscina is thought potentially to be medieval, although it was not possible to date it absolutely. It is undoubtedly earlier than the Tudor panelling which concealed it (it is not mentioned by Pevsner) and it is located in the same wall as the niche containing medieval wall paintings; this is on the north wall of the main body of the church, at a slightly lower level. It is possibly contemporary with the blocked door(s) in the east wall of the chapel. Whether they together represent features from the priory or an earlier arrangement of the north chapel of the church remains unclear at this time.

References.

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

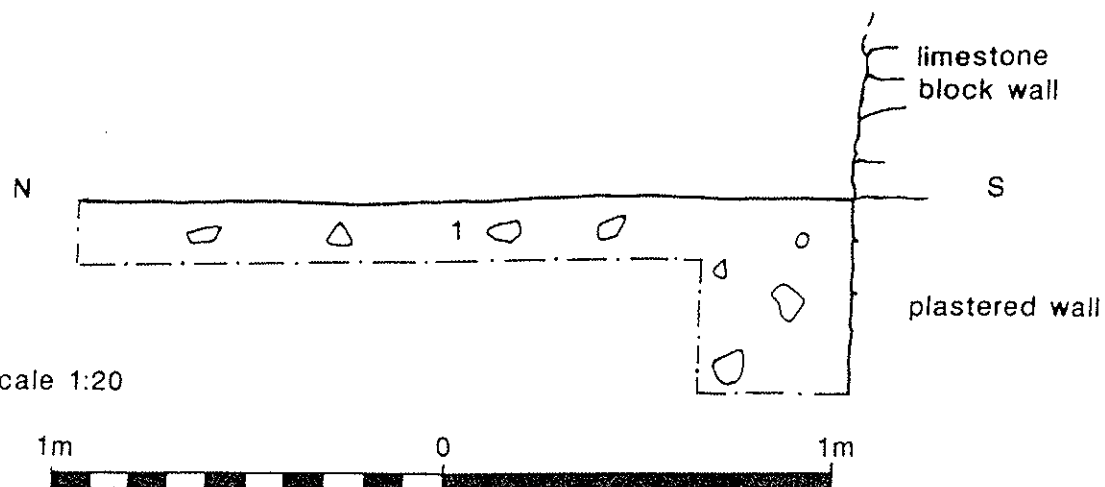
Figure 2 : North Chapel - Plan View



Scale 1:50



Figure 3 : Section



Scale 1:20

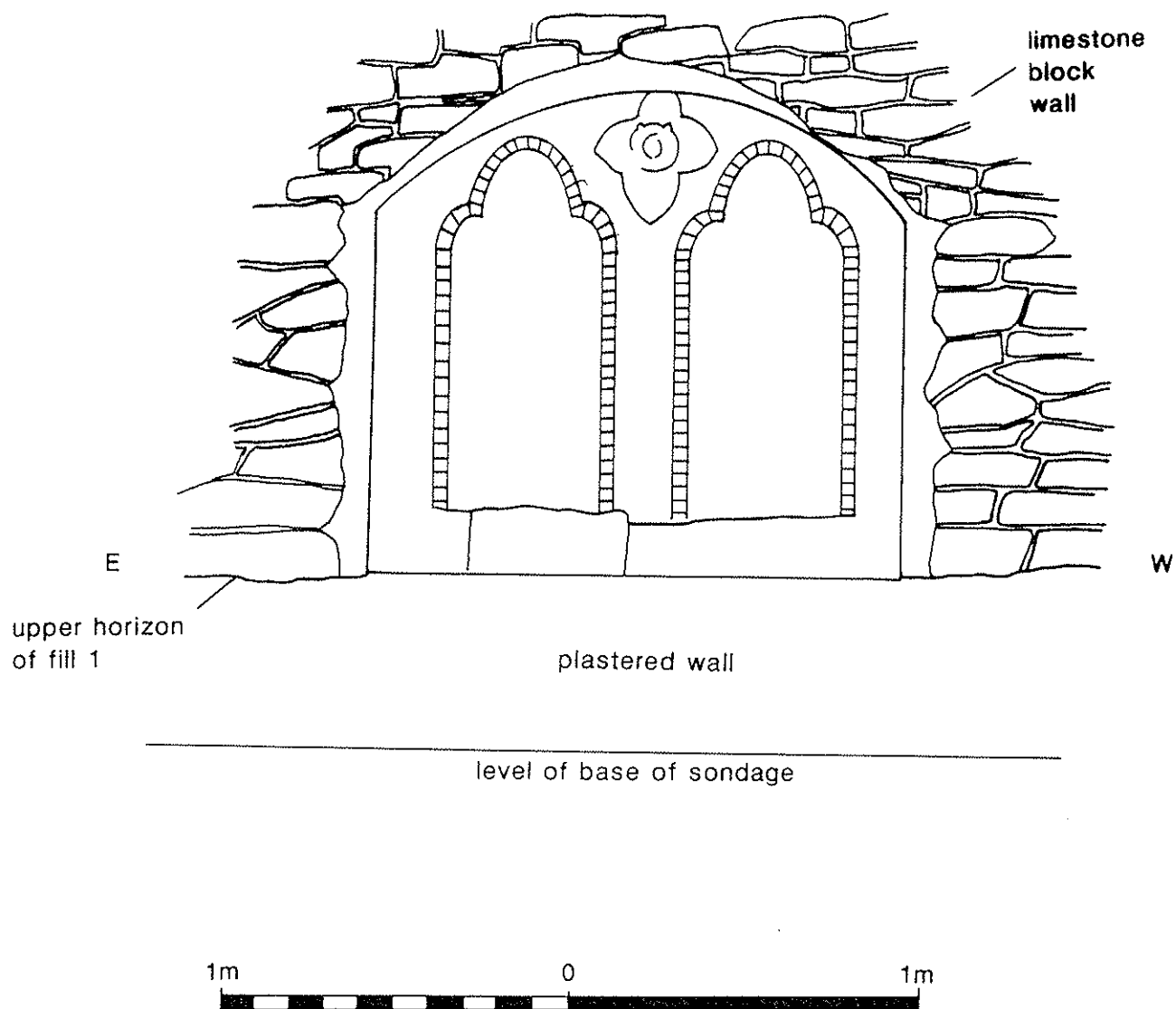


FIGURE 4 : Scaled sketch of Piscina



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Telephone: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: oau-oxford.demon.co.uk



Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES