

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, HIGH WYCOMBE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

All Saints Church, High Wycombe

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NGR 865 935

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief in April 1998 on an area located in the churchyard of All Saints Church, High Wycombe on behalf of Sir William Halcrow and Partners Ltd in respect of a faculty for landscaping of the churchyard and a brief set by, and a WSI agreed with, the County Archaeologist. The existence of a burial vault was unknown prior to the excavation of two trenches for new walls to be located adjacent to a new driveway in the northern area of the churchyard. Two trenches were excavated, revealing a small stretch of wall of uncertain date, probably post-medieval.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

In April 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at All Saints Church, High Wycombe on behalf of Sir William Halcrow and Partners Ltd in respect of a faculty for landscaping of the churchyard and a brief set by, and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with, the County Archaeologist. The existence of a vault was known from a previous recording action in February 1998. The burial vault was located below the new north-south aligned driveway. The watching brief was undertaken because of the excavation of two trenches for new walls, to be located adjacent to a new driveway in the northern area of the churchyard. It was also to record any archaeological features exposed during the laying of a concrete slab, measuring 3 x 2 x 0.20 m, which was to be laid over the top of the vault. The OAU was contracted only to undertake a watching brief.

All Saints Church is located in the centre of the town of High Wycombe, between Castle Street and High Street (NGR 865 935). The proposed new wall is to be constructed adjacent to a new north-south aligned driveway, and is located on the northern edge of the churchyard, which is bounded by Castle Street (Fig.1).

2 AIMS OF WATCHING BRIEF

- 1 to record any further information revealed by ground surface removal
- 2 to record, if possible, the full extent of the burial vault
- 3 to make available the results of the investigation

3 METHODOLOGY

The two trenches were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures stipulated in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson 1992). A scale plan, scale 1:50, and sketch section were both produced. No finds were recovered or samples taken from any of the features described.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

A small portion of wall was discovered during the excavation of trench A (Fig. 2). The trench, aligned northeast-southwest, is located on the northern edge of the churchyard, bounded by Castle Street. After removal of c 0.35 m of overburden an east-west aligned wall (05) was revealed.

In the larger trench (Fig. 2) c. 0.35 m of overburden was removed to reveal a compact layer (08), and a number of modern service trenches. This layer represented the impact level.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 The wall

The east-west aligned wall (05) (Fig. 2) was built of a combination of both red brick and glazed brick, bonded by lime-based mortar. In plan the wall was rectangular and measured 0.72 m in length (east-west), 0.38 m in width (north-south) and 0.17 m in height. Only four courses of brick were visible. The wall was constructed using Flemish bond and appeared to have an off-set foundation on the southern face. The upper course of the wall comprised a number of coping bricks, which were removed during the machining. The off-set foundation comprised a course of alternating red and ceramic brick: two ceramic bricks followed by a red brick. The cut (06) for the wall was not very clear in section, although in plan the foundations did appear to have been constructed in a cut (06).

5.2 The compact layer

When the overburden was removed in the larger trench (Fig. 2) a compact layer (07) measuring 2.70 m north-south and 0.94 m east-west was revealed. It comprised small pebbles and gravel in a light-yellow-clay matrix. The layer had been heavily truncated to the east and west by modern service trenches.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The full extent of the vault was not revealed and therefore was not recorded. However, further structures and deposits were revealed these were recorded in as much detail as possible.

6.2 Overall interpretation

The function of the wall is unclear due to the fact that only a small area was revealed. No date can be affirmed for the wall (05) as no finds were recovered from the fill (04) of the cut. It seems likely that the wall is of post-medieval date, given the presence of glazed bricks and the size and style of the red bricks. The wall may be part of a grave surround or mausoleum structure. This is suggested by the use of glazed brick in the structure, presumably used in order to create a distinctive pattern which could be seen internally or externally

The function of the compact layer is unclear due to the amount of truncation. It is highly probable that the layer is late 19th or 20th century as it covers the burial vault, which dates to c. 1830-1840 (Boyle 1998). The layer could possibly be an ornamental surface covering the burial vault, or may represent an early pathway/access route to or around the church.

The exact extent of the burial vault was not established during the watching brief. It is assumed that the eastern extent of the burial vault was identified during machine clearance and is represented by the edge of the excavation (Fig. 2). No indication of the north, south or western sides was evident because only c. 0.35 m of overburden

was removed. It is possible, given the results of the recording action carried out in February 1998, to speculate that the area stripped most probably covers the entire surface area of the burial vault.

6.3 Further work

A brief summary of the results of the recording action and watching brief will be submitted for inclusion in the County Journal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boyle, A. 1998 *All Saints High Wycombe, Archaeological Recording Action*. Oxford Archaeological Unit, (unpublished report).
- Wilkinson, D. 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

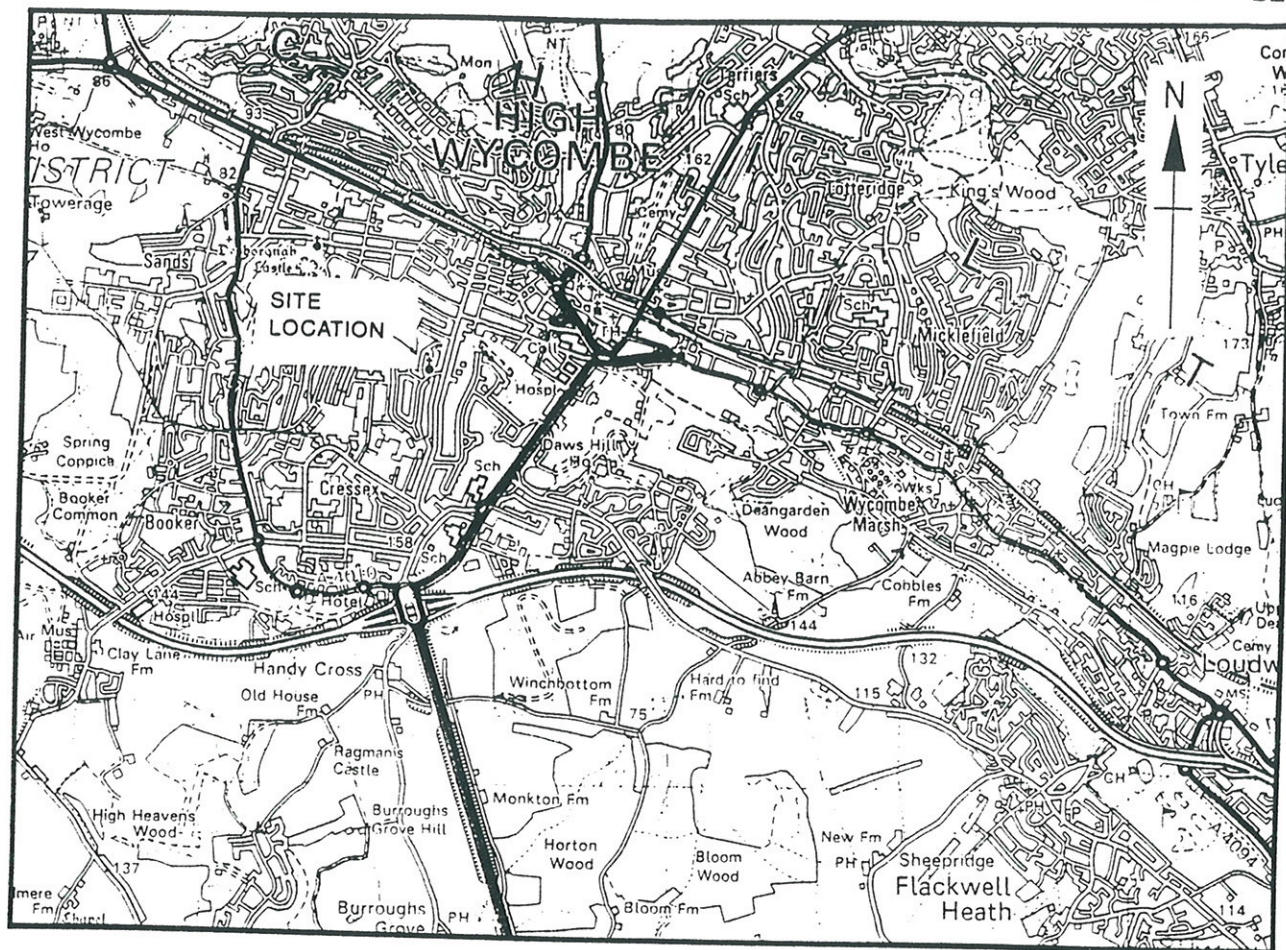
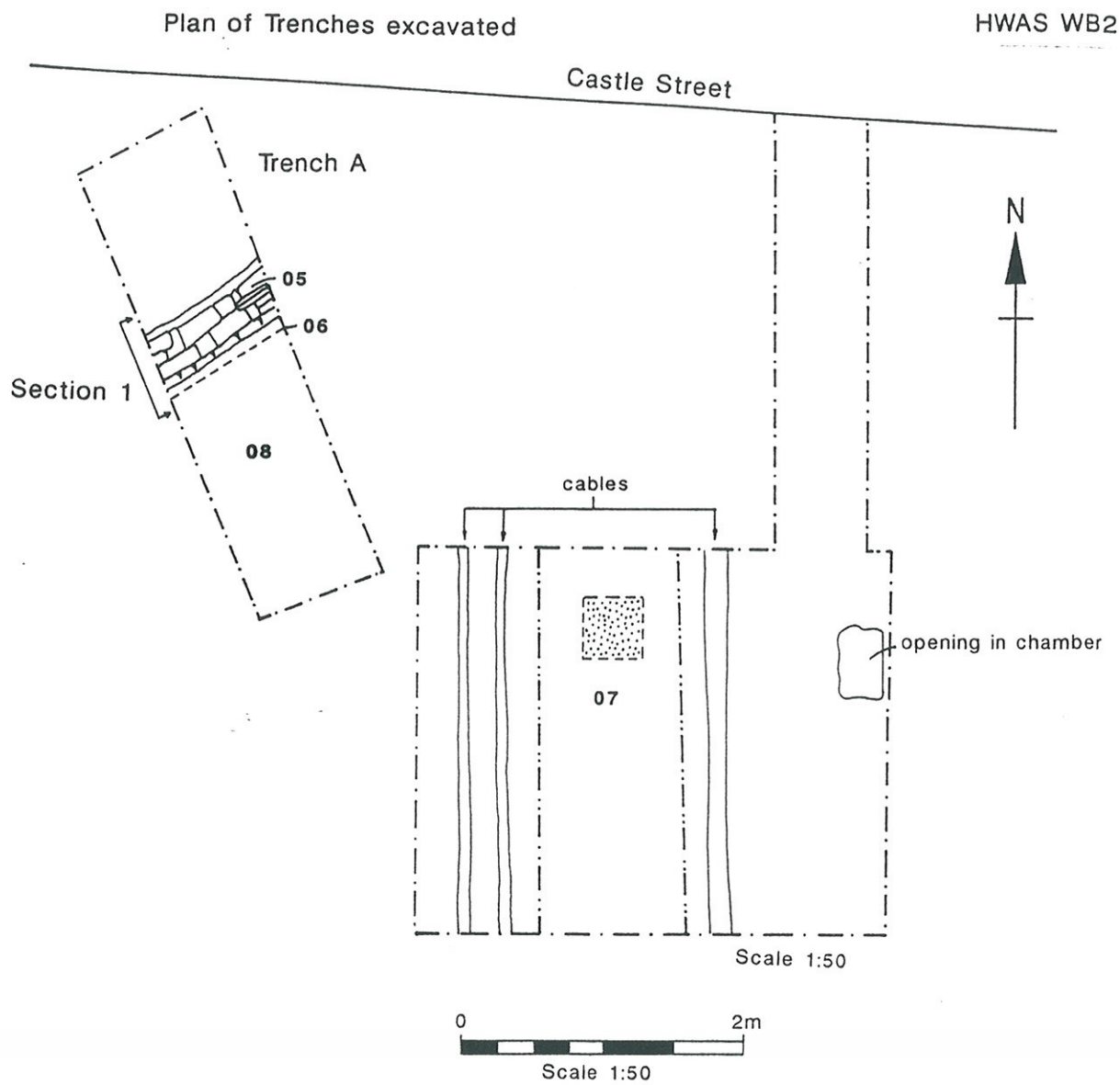


Figure 1 Site location



East facing sketch section
through Trench A

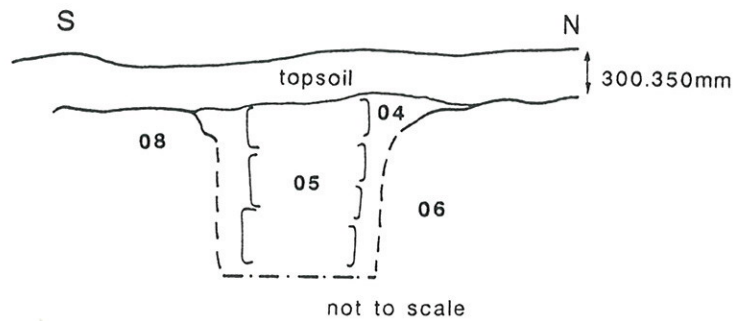


Figure 2



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