

Chancel Floor St Peter's Church Iver Buckinghamshire

**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



November 2006

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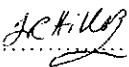
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**St Peter's Church,
Iver, Buckinghamshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

| | |
|--|---|
| Summary | 1 |
| 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Location and scope of work..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Geology and topography..... | 1 |
| 1.3 Archaeological and historical background | 1 |
| 1.4 Acknowledgements..... | 3 |
| 2 Project Aims and Methodology | 3 |
| 2.1 Aims..... | 3 |
| 2.2 Methodology..... | 3 |
| 3 Results | 3 |
| 3.1 Description of deposits | 3 |
| 3.2 Finds | 5 |
| 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains..... | 5 |
| 4 Discussion and Conclusions | 5 |
| Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory..... | 7 |
| Appendix 2 Bibliography and References..... | 8 |
| Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details..... | 8 |

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location
Fig. 2 Plan of Chancel Floor

SUMMARY

On the 1st and 2nd of November 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Peter's, Iver, Buckinghamshire (NGR: TQ 0500 8130). The work was commissioned by Iris Preston in advance of a proposal to remove the existing floor of the chancel in order to carry out essential repairs. The watching brief revealed the sleeper walls for the 17th century box pews, the alterations caused during their replacement by the choir stalls in the 19th century and the disruption caused by the insertion of the underground boiler room, also in the 19th century. No evidence for the Anglo-Saxon apse was observed and little evidence for the presence of burial vaults under the undisturbed parts of the chancel floor.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On the 1st and 2nd of November 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Iver, Buckinghamshire (NGR: TQ 0500 8130). The work was commissioned by Iris Preston in respect of a proposal to remove the existing floor of the chancel in order to carry out essential repairs.
- 1.1.2 A specification for the work was drawn up by Tebbot and Wells Ltd (2006).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of these specifications (OA, 2006).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The settlement of Iver is situated approximately 8 km east of the town of Slough. The church is located on the eastern edge of the village on a glacial sand and gravel terrace leading down the Colne Brook. The area of investigation was within the chancel of the church and occupies an area $c80\text{m}^2$ at a height of approximately 36.5 m above OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2006) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 There are several known sites and locations with archaeological remains near to the site of St Peter's.
- 1.3.3 Trenches dug between Iver Churchyard and the M25 to re-route electricity services in 1983 uncovered Saxon grass-tempered pottery, medieval pottery sherds and undated burnt daub. In addition 4 test pits dug as part of the Iver-Arkley water pipe by RPS Clouston in 1994 recovered a retouched flint flake in one pit and charcoal in another.

A watching brief undertaken by OA in 2001 within the churchyard showed that the area had been heavily disturbed by grave digging with no evidence for any possible earlier Saxon church observed (OA 2001).

- 1.3.4 Buckinghamshire SMR identifies a few prehistoric finds from this period in the study area. These are two Palaeolithic handaxes (SMR 2397 and 5982) and a Mesolithic tranchet axe (SMR 5319). The geology of the site would have favoured settlement of the area from the prehistoric period onwards.
- 1.3.5 There are no records held by the SMR that indicate a Roman presence in the study area. However, the presence of some Roman brick and tile used in the eastern angles of the nave of St. Peter's church (SMR 0846) may indicate Roman occupation nearby.
- 1.3.6 The first known reference to Iver appears in the *Chronicle of Aethelweard* under the year AD 893. The discovery of a Saxon grass-tempered sherd during the building of the M25 near the churchyard of St. Peter's also indicates a Saxon presence in the area at this time.
- 1.3.7 During the early medieval period, Buckinghamshire SMR records the presence of three mills (SMR 2829) and four fisheries (SMR 1680) within the parish; both are recorded in the Domesday Book.
- 1.3.8 The other place of interest close to the site of development is Delaford Park (SMR 4385). This comes from de la ford, meaning "place or person of the ford", referring to the crossing of the Colne brook. Records show that the earliest recorded residents of the manor of Delaford were known by the name Ford and it is likely that they took their family name from the place name.
- 1.3.9 The earliest documentary reference to Delaford was in about 1250-1260. The house at Delaford is not on the site of the original medieval manor. This was burnt down in 1845 and the present house built on top of its foundations.
- 1.3.10 While rapid expansion of Iver is evident from the 1801 Enclosure map when compared with the modern map of the area, this has not been as prominent around the church and is more noticeable to the west and south-west of St Peter's church.
- 1.3.11 The church dates from the 12th century with evidence of an Anglo-Saxon church in the north side of the chancel and reuse of Roman tiles from a nearby building. The tower, chancel and south aisle being added in the 13th century. From the 14th century onwards a number of alterations were carried out in the form of windows and internal details and monuments (Pevsner and Williamson, 1994).
- 1.3.12 In 2005 an archaeological watching brief was conducted during the construction of an extension on the north side of the church. The area was seen to be heavily disturbed by grave cuts and burial chambers, but with no evidence of any earlier church structures or other archaeological features or deposits.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 I would like to thank Miss Iris Preston for the opportunity to undertake this investigation.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To provide a record of any structures exposed below the floor, with particular emphasis on determining the presence of any burial vaults.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as two site visits after contractors had removed the floor and pews on either side of the chancel.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the exposed features, including the exposed wooden beams, foundations and exposed deposits was drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 2) and a photographic record of the exposed features was made using colour slide and black and white print film. Where necessary selective cleaning was used to determine the possible presence of burial vaults. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Within the south side of the chancel floor the removal of the pews and floor exposed an overall layer of level compact light grey-brown clay silt (100). Built upon this deposit were a number of roughly constructed "sleeper" walls running both east-west and north-south (101). These walls were constructed using small fragments of limestone and fragments of red ceramic roofing tile, bonded using a lime mortar and measured approximately 0.25 m wide by 0.25 m high. These structures probably relate to the earlier box pews built in this location which were replaced by the installation of the choir stalls in the 1800s. Running along the base of the south wall of the chancel was a ledge 0.3 m wide built using a mixture of red brick and limestone bonded with a lime mortar (102). The size of the bricks suggest an early 19th century date. This may indicate that they were laid as part of the installation of the choir pews in order to support an east-west wooden beam as on the northern side.
- 3.1.2 The wooden beams that survive were probably all installed as part of the refurbishment of the chancel during the installation of the choir pews (103). Tool

marks on the sides of the beams show that they were sawn to size using a pit saw rather than machine sawn suggesting that were sourced locally although it is possible that they were reused from a different location. The earlier 17th century sleeper walls have been reused to support these later beams, however the timber arrangement is different and the sleeper walls have only been reused as pads supporting the timber in specific places.

- 3.1.3 One of the aims of the watching brief was to determine the presence (or otherwise) of burial vaults under the floor within this area of the chancel. In order to determine this, selected areas of layer 100 were cleaned. No distinct areas of different material, indicative of possible grave fill or reburial of vaults was observed, however a very loose area of material was encountered in the north-west corner of the removed flooring which consisted of a mixture of silts and 19th century building debris (104). This might indicate a collapsed vault or more likely infill of part of the earlier underfloor heating system.
- 3.1.4 Careful examination of western end of the exposed area failed to observe any evidence for an Anglo-Saxon apse, there is the possibility that the material had been robbed out below ground level, however this would have left evidence of a robber trench, none of which was observed.
- 3.1.5 The removal of the floor and pews on the northern side of the chancel exposed a similar layer of compact light grey-brown clay silt as on the southern side, although there was a pronounced rise in the material towards the centre of the area (105). The east-west and north-south sleeper walls are positioned similarly to the southern side but are constructed using red brick whose size suggests a mid to late 19th century date (107). Similarly the ledge along the north wall of the chancel had been constructed using the same size red brick suggesting that it had been constructed as part of the same phase of work (108).
- 3.1.6 The exposed timber beams display a similar layout to those within the southern half, however certain of the joints are out of square suggesting that they may have lifted and relaid (109).
- 3.1.7 The raised area is situated directly above the arched part of the boiler room which had been excavated in the 1860s. Measurement of the internal dimensions of the boiler and allowing for the thickness of its walls showed that there must have been a minimum excavation of 4.5 m east-west and 4.5 m north-south (110). This would have extended across the northern half of the chancel up to the southern edge of the aisle, and would have destroyed at least 66% of the floor area exposed by the lifting of the floor. In reality the excavation would have been bigger, destroying a much larger area. The compact grey-brown material exposed must therefore have been redeposited after construction of the boiler room. This would account for the sleeper walls being constructed of more modern material than in the southern half, since they would all have had to have been rebuilt after the boiler room had been constructed.

- 3.1.8 In the north-western corner of this area part of an arched brick structure could be observed protruding above the grey-brown material and this may be part of a burial vault (106). In the south-west corner of the area a void could be observed leading into a narrow brick lined passageway running east-west underneath the aisle (111). The eastern extent of this feature presumably runs into the excavations for the boiler room, while the western extent has been plotted and runs into the nave before curving slightly northwards. The small size of the void did not permit access into the brick passageway however careful observation using spotlights showed that were brick pillars built within it, probably to support the weight of the aisle floor.
- 3.1.9 Directly opposite the void, the brickwork on the southern side of the passage way had collapsed exposing what appeared to be lead sheeting, possibly the side of a lead coffin (112). This was located just south of the centre of the aisle and 1.2 m in from the nave.
- 3.1.10 It is suggested that this brick built passageway was a flue forming part of the under floor heating associated with the boiler room when it was first constructed. There is no evidence for this passageway visible within the current boiler room and it is possible that any openings have since been bricked up. It is likely that a similar brick passageway ran eastwards from the boiler room towards the alter and that the area of loose material noted within the southern half of the chancel floor may be part of it's backfill.
- 3.1.11 No evidence for the presence of an Anglo-Saxon apse was observed within the area of the north chancel floor.

3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 The only artefacts observed during the course of the investigation were fragments of red ceramic roof tile used within the sleeper walls within the southern half of the chancel, red bricks used within the early 19th century sleeper walls and mid 19th century red bricks used within the brick passage way, boiler room construction and the sleeper walls within the northern half of the chancel.
- 3.2.2 These were recorded on site but were not retained. No human charnel indicative of disturbed graves and vaults was observed.

3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling was encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The watching brief showed that there is little discernible evidence for the presence of burial vaults visible within the area exposed during the removal of the pews and floor within the chancel area. A possible brick arched chamber was observed in the north-

west corner of the chancel, adjacent to the nave, however it appears to be too small in size for a vault and may be part of the earlier underfloor heating system. The presence of an area of loose material at the eastern end of the southern half of the chancel may indicate a vault or chamber, but is more likely to be backfilling of a similar brick passageway to that observed west of the boiler room.

- 4.1.2 The excavations for the boiler room have completely destroyed the majority of the north side of the chancel and underneath the centre of the aisle. There may be records for the exhumation and subsequent re-internment for any burials disturbed during this operation, this may require a document search in order to determine this.
- 4.1.3 No evidence for the presence of a possible Anglo-Saxon apse was encountered after removal of the floor. There is the possibility that the structure had been robbed out below ground, however no evidence for a robber trench or of discarded building materials was observed.
- 4.1.4 The edge of a possible vault below the western end of the aisle was observed within the side of the brick passageway below the floor, the confined access rendered it impossible to examine this or to precisely determine its size or location. The floor of the aisle above it had been relaid as part of the Victorian refurbishments, with the result that no grave marker can be attributed to this possible burial.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Depth/ Height</i> | <i>Width</i> | <i>Comments</i> | <i>Finds</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|----------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 100 | Layer | - | - | Original soil horizon | - | - |
| 101 | Structure | 0.3 m | 0.25 m | Sleeper walls for the original box pews | Red ceramic roof tile | C17th |
| 102 | Structure | 0.3 m | 0.3 m | Sleeper wall for the current pews | - | C19th |
| 103 | Structure | 0.1 m | 0.075 m | Timber framing supporting the current floor and pews | - | C19th |
| 104 | Fill | > 0.6m | 0.4 m | Area of loose material at eastern end of southern half of chancel | Brick fragments | C19th |
| 105 | Layer | - | - | Soil horizon exposed below northern half of chancel floor | - | C19th |
| 106 | Structure | - | 0.5 m | Top of brick arched structure | - | C18th/ C19th ? |
| 107 | Structure | 0.2 m - 0.6 m | 0.3 m | Brick sleeper wall | - | C19th |
| 108 | Structure | 0.2 m - 0.6 m | 0.3 m | Brick sleeper wall | - | C19th |
| 109 | Structure | 0.1 m | 0.075 m | Timber framing supporting the current floor and pews | - | C19th |
| 110 | Cut | 2.5 m | 4.5 m | Excavations for the boiler room | - | C19th |
| 111 | Structure | 0.7 m | 1.5 m | Brick passageway running under aisle. Probable original underfloor heating flue | - | C19th |
| 112 | Burial | 0.5 m | 0.7 m | Edge of possible lead coffin and burial vault visible through collapse in side of (111) | - | C18th/ C19th ? |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 1992 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2001 *St. Peter's Church, Iver, Buckinghamshire: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual (ed D Wilkinson)*

Tebbot and Wells Ltd 2006 *Specification for the Repair, Remedial and Reinstatement Works together with an Archaeological Investigation of the floors beneath the two Chancel Choir Stalls at the Church of St Peter, Iver, Buckinghamshire*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Peter's Church, Iver, Buckinghamshire

Site code: IVERCH 06

Grid reference: TQ 0500 8130

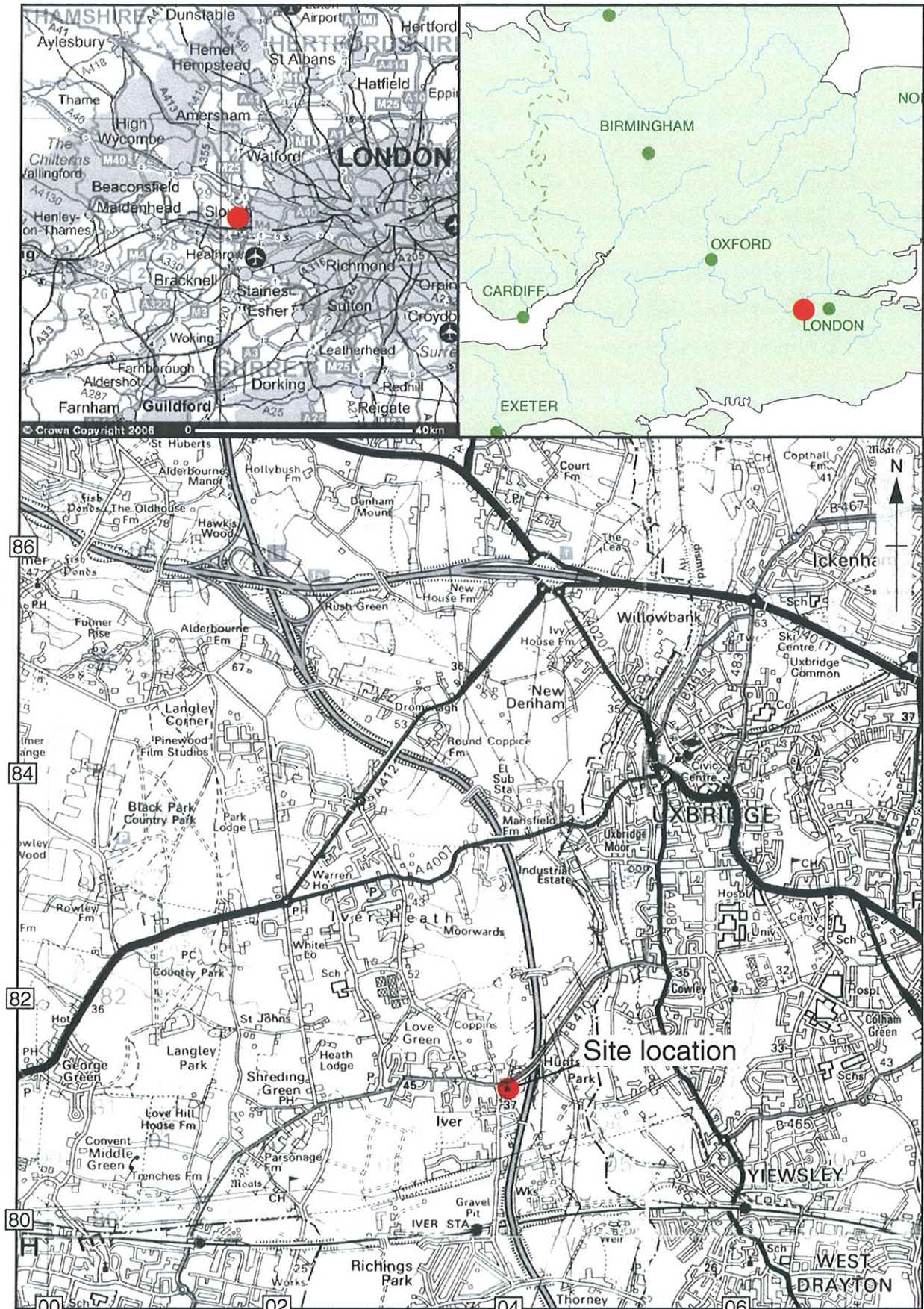
Type of watching brief: Identification of deposits and features after removal of the existing floor within the chancel

Date and duration of project: 1st and 2nd November 2006, 2 days

Area of site: 80m²

Summary of results: The watching brief observed the foundation walls for the 17th century box pews, the alterations occurring during the 19th century replacement with choir stalls and the disruption caused by the insertion of the boiler room in the 19th century. No evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Apse and little evidence for burial vaults under the pews was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: AYBM:2006.209



1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

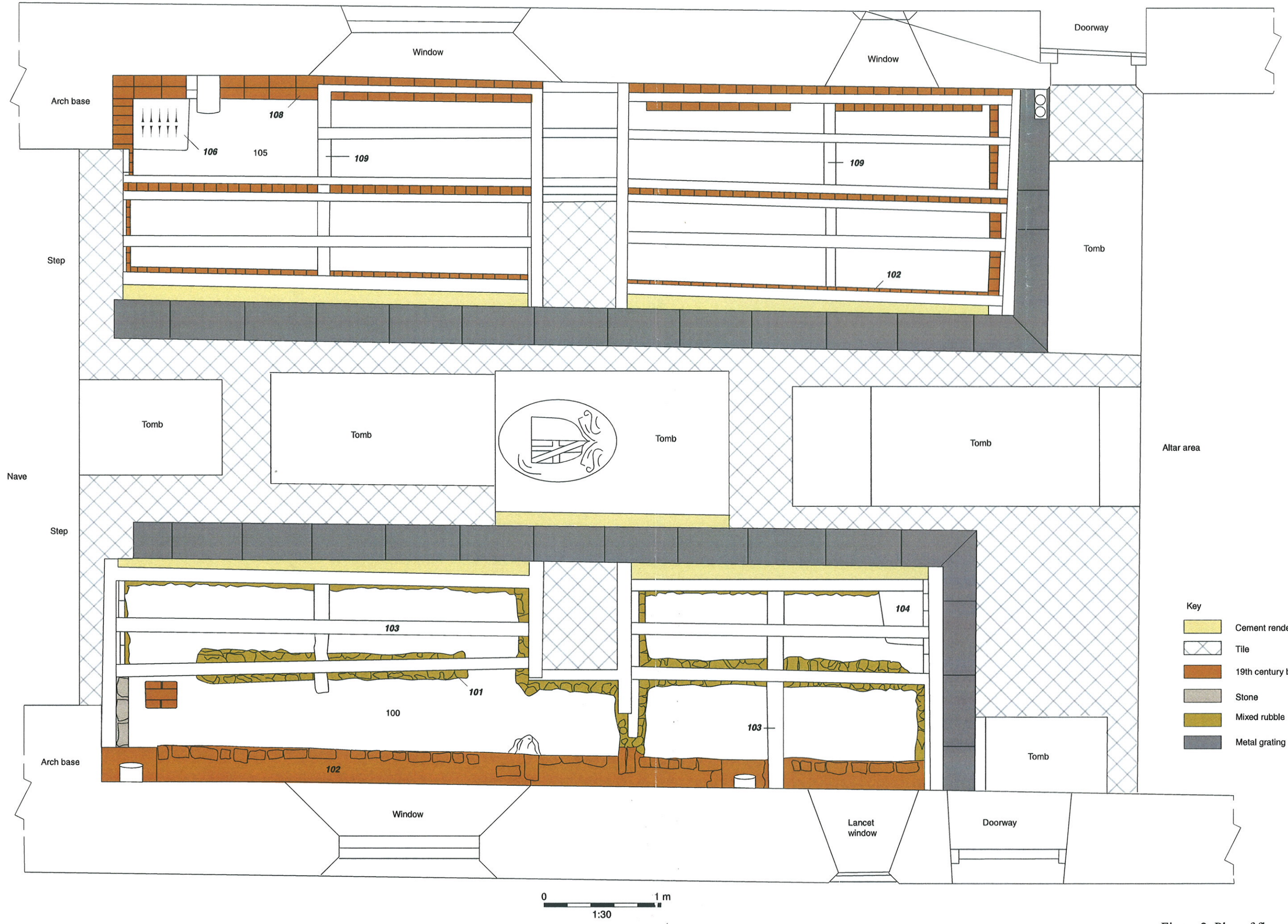


Figure 2: Plan of floor of chancel



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