

J. Hillier

The Rector and Churchwardens of St Mary the Virgin, Long Crendon

**Church of St Mary the Virgin
Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire**

NGR SP 697 091

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit
April 2001

The Rector and Churchwardens of St Mary the Virgin, Long Crendon

**Church of St Mary the Virgin
Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire**

NGR SP 697 091

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit
April 2001

THE RECTOR AND CHURCHWARDENS OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, LONG CRENDON

**Church of St. Mary the Virgin
Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire**

NGR SP 697 091

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared by: J Dalton/J Hiller/S Reeve

Date: December 2000

Reeve

Checked by: J Hiller

Date: December 2000

JM pp John Hiller

Approved by: Paul Booth

Paul Booth

Date: December 2000

Oxford Archaeological Unit
December 2000

Church of St. Mary the Virgin Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire

Contents

Summary

	INTRODUCTION	
1	Introduction.....	1
2	Historical Background.....	1
3	Aims and Objectives.....	2
4	Methodology.....	2
5	RESULTS	
	5.1 Test Pits.....	3
	5.2 Watching Brief on Trenching.....	3
	5.3 The Church Foundations.....	4
6	Finds.....	5
7	Conclusions.....	6

Bibliography

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1 & 2	Foundations of south aisle and south transept
3	West side of south porch
4, 5 & 6	Skull and bone fragments found close to the dormer window in the south aisle
7	Charnel fragments close to south wall of chancel
8 & 9	Foundations of the chancel east end, facing south
10	Foundations of the chancel east end, facing north
11	Foundations exposed to the rear of the chancel
12	South end of east wall of chancel
13	North east buttress of the north transept wall
14 & 15	Foundations of north transept wall, revealing a brick burial vault
16	Detail of brick vault by north transept wall

LIST OF FIGURES

1	Plan of St Mary the Virgin, Long Crendon
---	--

Church of St Mary the Virgin Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

In February 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Long Crendon (NGR SP 697 091), during the excavation of test pits prior to the installation of a new drainage system around the church. One sherd of medieval and several pieces of post-medieval window glass were recovered from deposits within the test pits. Lead window frame (comes) were also found; these are also probably post-medieval in date. A brick wall offset from the church wall may have been part of a vault, disturbed when the brick drain was constructed around the church. A watching brief on the drain trenches revealed little further information beyond the burial vault; but details of the foundations of the church were significant and while mostly confirming the known history of the church suggested that the transepts may have originated as smaller chapels.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A programme of improvements to the drainage facilities was undertaken at this church. The works included a run of drains round the perimeter of the church, on the line of (but deeper than) the existing perimeter drain and a number of drains linking to five soakaways. An archaeological condition was attached to the Faculty for the works (detailed on drawings supplied by Patricia Brock, Architects; Nos. 166/1-4, January 1999, and held in the archive).
- 1.2 The watching brief was commissioned by the architects on behalf of the Rector and PCC of the Church, and the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) initiated the work in February 2000. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a brief prepared by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with the Diocesan Advisory Committee's Archaeological Advisor, Mr Julian Munby.
- 1.3 An archaeologist from OAU was in attendance for the digging of three test pits, undertaken by builders BHL of Oxford, prior to the excavations proper of the drainage runs, which were monitored by Mrs Christine Chadwick, whose observations are incorporated here. Further observations on the church foundations were made by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor.

2 Background

- 2.1 St Mary's Church, Long Crendon is a medieval church in a village that historically was large and prosperous. The Domesday Survey makes no mention of either a

church or priest at Long Crendon, but the church is likely to have been established shortly after the Norman Conquest. William 1 granted the manor of Crendon to his kinsman Walter Giffard (one of the assessors of the Domesday survey) and it is recorded that in 1182 he founded an Augustine Abbey at nearby Nutley (later Notley).

- 2.2 There are Norman fragments, but it is predominantly Early English (chancel, nave, south aisle), with 14th-century additions of transepts, north aisle and porches, with a Perpendicular crossing tower and 16th-century west porch. It was restored in 1890-1 by Blomfield. [Pevsner and Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), 444-5; RCHM *Buckinghamshire (South)* (1912), 235-7, with plan]
- 2.3 The interior of the north transept (corresponding to exterior test Pit 3) has a recessed stone arch and is reputed to be the possible burial place of Valentine Bownds, the last Abbot of Notley priory whose will decreed that, following his death in 1541, he be buried in Long Crendon Church. The actual site is unrecorded.
- 2.4 An Iron Age settlement existed east of the present village, and burials thought to be of Roman date are also known but poorly recorded.

3 Aims and objectives

- 3.1 The aims and objectives of the watching brief were to determine the character and survival of any remains of the medieval church outside the present church and to investigate and preserve by record any significant archaeological deposits
- 3.2 To make available the results of the investigation in the form of a report and produce an archive of the investigation.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The watching brief comprised an initial investigation of test-pits excavated on the line of the drains, and a further watching brief on subsequent ground-disturbances.
- 4.2 Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the test pits were cleaned, inspected and recorded. Written records were made on pro-forma sheets and colour slide and black and white print photographs were taken. Recording was undertaken in accordance with standard OAU practices (OAU 1992).
- 4.3 All deposits were allocated unique context numbers. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and plans at a scale of 1:200.
- 4.4 The excavations of the service trench runs were monitored by Mrs Chadwick who also took the photographs, and further observations on the foundations were made by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor.

5 Results

5.1 Test Pits

5.1.1 A total of 3 test pits was excavated by the contractors in the first phase of work.

5.1.2 Test Pit 1

Test Pit 1 measured 1 m x 0.6 m and was 0.9 m deep. It was excavated against the east wall of the church (the chancel wall). The only deposit excavated was a dark brown sandy loam (3) with mortar and stone fragments, that also contained some glass and lead came from a window. The soil abutted the wall footing of the chancel (2) that was constructed of uneven courses of sandstone blocks bonded with a light grey lime-based mortar. The lower two courses were offset by 0.15 m from the wall face, to provide an offset foundation for the wall.

5.1.3 Test Pit 2

Test Pit 2 measured 0.7 m by 0.6 m and was 0.9 m deep. It was excavated against the south transept wall. The earliest deposit seen was a layer of brown silty clay loam (8) containing limestone fragments, to a depth of 0.45 m. Above lay a 0.02 m thick deposit of light grey-white mortar (7), presumably derived from undated building works on the church, which was in turn overlain by a layer of light brown sandy silt that was 0.09 m thick. This deposit was cut by the construction trench (14) for the existing brick drain.

At the base of the cut was a bedding deposit of compact sandy mortar (5) with brick and stone rubble within the deposit, which was 0.25 m thick, into which the bricks were laid.

5.1.4 Test Pit 3

Test Pit 3 was excavated against the north transept wall and measured 0.6 m x 0.7 m and was 0.9 m deep. The base of the north transept wall (10) was seen to be partly obscured by a length of brick wall (11). The bricks were of Victorian or later date and were bonded with a grey cement. The wall stood proud of the church wall by 0.06 m and as seen was at least 6 courses high. The brick wall was covered with a layer of compacted brown silty loam (13) that contained mortar, limestone pieces and pieces of glass and lead came. This was cut by the construction trench (15) that contained the sand bedding (12) for the brick drain surrounding the church.

5.2 Watching Brief on Trenching

5.2.1 Work began in February 2000 to install a deeper drainage system than currently existed, around the perimeter of the church to a depth of 1 metre, together with new drains leading from the church wall to five soakaways. The progression of the excavation commenced at the west porch and continued around the church in an easterly direction. Finds are noted below in section 6.2.

5.2.2 *Rear of chancel*

Following the digging of Test Pit 1, a stepped footing was unearthed (Photos 8-11) but it was not possible to dig further down than the prescribed 1 metre in order to investigate further.

5.2.3 *North transept wall*

The soil directly beneath a badly weathered and indecipherable plaque set into the wall produced a coffin-shaped length of brickwork divided into sections (Photos 14,15,16) which was covered by a surface layer of mortar and limestone fragments. Time and resources did not permit deeper excavation of this pit, but it is interesting that it is on the outside wall corresponding to the 'possible' location of the grave of Valentine Bownds, mentioned above. No explanation is obvious as to any connection with the tomb recess under the north window of the north transept. Disturbance of this part of the site during the Victorian era or later is a possibility judging by the age of this brickwork. It was decided to leave this in position and route the new drain around it.

5.2.4 A considerable amount of ashlar was found on the site particularly in the area of the south aisle and south transept which caused initial problems with the manual digging. However no worked stone was excavated which was judged to be worthy of further investigation, the larger pieces being left in situ. After completion of the trench excavation the new pipes were laid and the site infilled with shingle in accordance with the builder's specification.

5.3 *The Church Foundations*

5.3.1 One of the more interesting aspects of the work was the opportunity to examine the entire runs of masonry foundations around the church, and compare the character of different lengths with the phasing of the church indicated on the RCHM plan of 1912.

5.3.2 The foundations are described anti-clockwise from the north-west corner:

Aisle west wall: Foundations obscured by concrete/brick/chalk edge to former drain channel, but foundation offset was here above ground and only exposed by ?19th-century lowering of the churchyard.

Porch north and south wall: The porch foundation is of large stones, distinct from adjoining walls.

Nave and aisle west wall: The nave foundation has one offset, the aisle a double offset foundation, with a big block at the south-west corner.

Aisle south wall (west): Foundation minimal.

Porch west and east walls: A single stone offset foundation, covered (on west) with concrete/ brick/chalk from former drain. (photo 3)

Aisle south wall: Irregular foundation offset, with one deeper patch, possibly over

old grave. In the aisle/transept corner is a deep foundation pier of chalk, brick and concrete, probably modern underpinning. (photos 1 & 2)

Transept west wall: An offset ashlar foundation, similar to ashlar walling above.

Transept south wall: Foundation apparently not offset (neither are buttresses)

Transept east wall: [South half] offset ashlar foundation, [north half] replaced in concrete, beneath what appears to be an older wall.

Chancel south wall: A neatly offset foundation of rubble blocks, getting larger towards the east. (photo 7)

Chancel east wall: Similar to south wall, but with two offsets, and with large ashlar blocks at the corners. (photos 8-12)

Chancel north wall: Foundations not visible

Transept east wall: [South end] Single rubble offset for 4 m. [North end] broader foundation for next 4 m.

Transept north wall: Foundation rubble flush with wall (no offset); trench interrupted by 19th-century brick (double) vault in centre of wall. The north east corner buttress have large chalk/brick/mortar foundation, i.e. modern underpinning. (photos 12 & 13)

Transept west wall: Obscured by heating chamber.

Aisle north wall: [First part as last] The foundations are exposed above ground as a rubble offset (i.e. by lowering of the churchyard); below them is the chalk/brick/concrete support for the former drains.

North Porch: On the east side similar to the aisle foundations; but not much visible on other sides.

- 5.3.3 Evidently the churchyard has been lowered considerably on the north side of the church by as much as a metre. Most of the foundations reflect the known breaks in the building observed from above-ground features, and the distinct foundations of the chancel are of some interest. Especially noteworthy is the break detected in the east wall of each of the transepts, implying that both aisles may have flanked the tower before the transepts were added.

6 Finds

- 6.1 The only finds recovered from the test pit excavations were of glass and lead came from two contexts. Context 3 produced 10 pieces of window glass of which one exhibited decoration of medieval date while the rest were of plain glass and probably post-medieval. The came material did not show any sign of tooling and may therefore not have been milled.

Context 13 produced a section of window comprising lead came with the

window glass attached. Four separate pieces of lead came were recovered; the pieces presumably represent evidence of a window replacement, though the date of this cannot be ascertained. Samples of came were opened but no date or initials were found within apart from plain milling.

- 6.2 Finds from the watching brief were minimal, and according to the site foreman no artefacts were discovered other than those mentioned below, in addition to the large masses of skeletal material: one fragment of brown glazed tile; one small sherd of blue and white glazed pottery (both on the south side of the church); one flat iron ring 2 ins diameter, badly encrusted; one 3 in flat nail (both in area of north aisle wall). These were not retained.

Fragmented skeletal material (charnel) was considerable. No complete skeletons were unearthed, although this may have been due in part to the method of digging with spades. Numerous long bones were brought to the surface as well as skull fragments. These were all bagged up for reinterment by Father Roger Jackson, and smaller fragments were left close to their original siting and covered in shingle when infilling for the new drains took place (Photo 7). The soil below the modern engraved dormer window in the south aisle produced skull and bone fragments close to a ground level marked grave (Photos 4,5,6).

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 Little archaeological evidence was forthcoming from the 3 test pits regarding the early medieval history of this church. The only medieval find was a piece of decorated window glass, presumably part of an early or possibly original window. The brick walling in test pit 3 may represent restoration work or be part of a vault that was disturbed when the Victorian drainage channel was constructed.
- 7.2 The watching brief on the remainder of the service trenches was mainly of significance for revealing the variety of foundations round the church, which have in part confirmed the known history of the church, but have also suggested that the transepts are not of a single build.
- 7.3 The archaeological observation of the works has been worthwhile in ensuring that information of value has not been lost, and has provided some more information about the structural history of the church that can be considered in future work.

Oxford Archaeological Unit
December 2000

Bibliography

Wilkinson D 1992 *OAU Fieldwork Manual*

Table of Context information

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Test pit	0.9 m	1 m	Test pit 1 against east wall of church
2	Wall footing	0.9 m+	-	Offset footings of the east wall, sandstone blocks
3	Layer	0.9 m	-	Churchyard soil abutting church wall
4	Test Pit	0.9 m	0.6 m	Test pit 2
5	Fill	0.25 m	-	Mortar, stone and brick rubble bedding for brick-built drain around the church
6	Layer	0.09 m	-	Sandy silt with mortar against church wall, overlies 7
7	Layer	0.02 m	0.45 m	Mortar deposit from building activity
8	Layer	0.45 m	-	Clay loam and limestone fragments
9	Test pit	0.9 m	0.6 m	Test pit 3
10	Wall	0.9 m+	-	Wall of church
11	Wall	0.6 m	0.1 m+	Brick wall, either a repair to the footings or part of a burial vault
12	Layer	0.25 m	-	Sandy mortar bedding for brick drain
13	Layer	0.4 m	-	Soil layer abutting church, mixed churchyard material
14	Cut	0.3 m	0.7 m	Construction cut for brick-built drain around the church
15	Cut	"	"	Same as 14

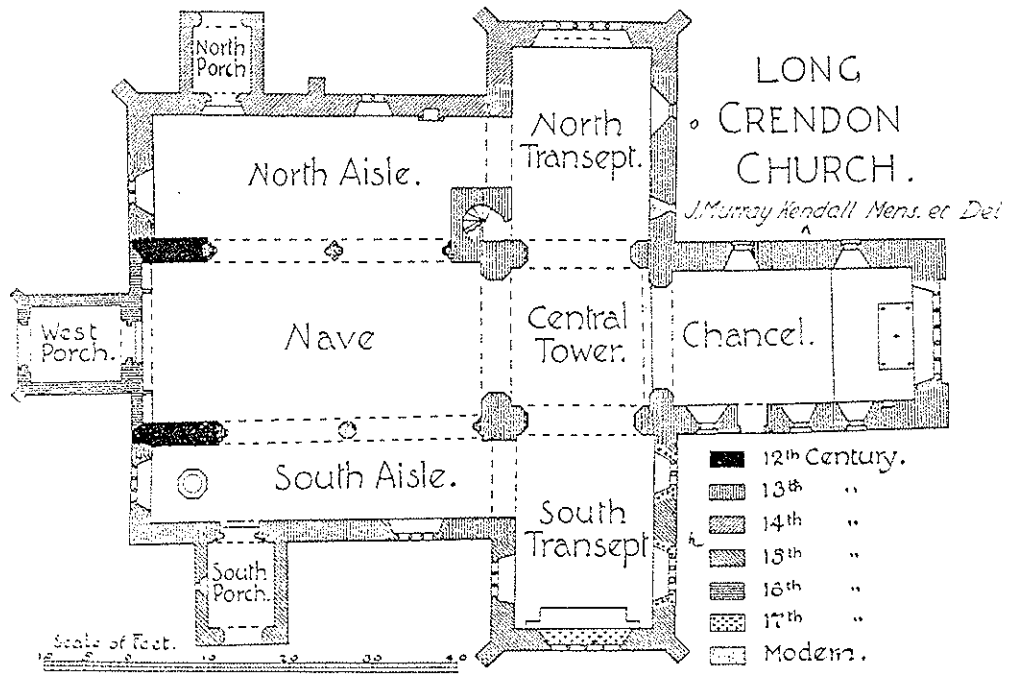


Fig 1: Plan of St Mary the Virgin, Long Crendon (from RCHM plan, 1912)



Photo 1 & 2: Foundations of the south aisle and south transept.



Photo 3: West side of south porch.



Photo 4, 5 & 6: Skull and bone fragments found close to the dormer window in the south aisle.



Photo 7: Charnel fragments close to south wall of chancel.



Photo 8 & 9: Foundations of the chancel east end, facing south.



Photo 10: Foundations of the chancel east end, facing north.



Photo 11: Foundations exposed to the rear of the chancel.



Photo 12: South end of east wall of chancel.



Photo 13: North east buttress of the north transept wall.



Photo 14 & 15: Foundations of north transept wall, revealing a brick burial vault.



Photo 16: Detail of brick vault by north transept wall.



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496
email: postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk



Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.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