ST MARY'S CHURCH, GARSINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE
NGR SP 458 203

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
AUGUST 1997

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Summary

A watching brief was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at this church in August 1997, during the excavation of a narrow trench for a new electricity cable. Part of an undated brick burial vault and a deposit of 19th century building material were observed during the work. No medieval or earlier finds or deposits were revealed.

1 Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at St Mary's Church, Garsington, Oxon., during the excavation by the Southern Electricity Board of a new electricity cable trench. The work was carried out on behalf of the Parish Council.

2 Historical and Archaeological Background

The church stands on a slight terrace at the south-west edge of the village. The West Tower dates to c. 1200 AD, the Nave and north/south aisles date to the 13th century, and the Chancel is of 14th century date. The church was restored in 1849 by J. Clarke, who rebuilt the Chancel arch. Of interest is a the east window, a high-quality work which was moved to St. Mary's from St. Giles, Oxford, in 1898 (Pevsner and Sherwood, 610-11).

A watching brief during floor restoration work here in 1992 revealed the remains of the robbed footing of earlier phase of the church (OAU, 1993). A watching brief in December 1994 during the excavation of soakaway trenches outside the building revealed some disarticulated human bones within the excavated soil layers and part of a Victorian burial, but no evidence of earlier structural phases of the church (OAU, 1995).

3 Methodology

The site was visited on 18th August 1997, to inspect the excavated trench, which extended from the western churchyard gate to the south side of the West Tower. A written and photographic record of the excavated trench was made.

4 Results

The cable trench was 0.3 m wide and 0.45 m deep, and was excavated for much of its' length along the gravel path at the south side of the churchyard. South of the church the trench was cut into topsoil and underlying layers, and the trench was routed round to the south face of the West Tower (Fig. 1).

The earliest deposit in the trench beneath the path was a 0.1 m+ deep layer of compact

reddish-brown sand (3), which was very clean, and may have been the natural subsoil. This was overlain by (2), a 0.2 m thick deposit of very sterile light grey silt loam. No dateable finds were recovered from this layer. The upper layer in the sequence was the path (1), which was composed of a layer of small and medium sized gravels, with a thickness of 0.1 m.

The trench extended east-west south of the church, where the ground level rose by around 0.2 m above the level of the path, which extended around the west side of the church. The lowest deposit in the trench here was a 0.12 m thick layer of friable dark grey-brown sandy loam (6), which contained occasional pieces of tile and some loose human bones. This layer was equivalent to layer 2 beneath the path. In the north-south leg of the trench, south of the West Tower, a brick structure (7) was observed in the west face of the trench. The structure was built into layer 6 but the small exposure of the structure precluded further investigation. It may have been a burial vault or possibly part of a drain. Structure 7 and layers 6 and 2 were overlain by a mixed loose layer (4) of grey sandy loam which was 0.25 m thick. Layer 4 contained frequent tile sherds, mortar, slate, small blocks of limestone and occasional pieces of lead. This layer appeared to have formed as a result of building activity. Layer 4 was sealed beneath layer 5, a 0.12 m thick layer of dark brown sandy loam, the topsoil. No pottery was recovered from the spoil from the excavated trench.

5 The finds

No dateable finds were recovered. Modern brick and tile pieces were not retained. A few disarticulated bones were found and these were re-interred in the cable trench.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The shallow depth of the trench meant that it only impinged on relatively modern layers. The buried soil beneath the path was undated, but if the churchyard path has always been sited here, then the soil may be medieval in origin. South of the church the raised ground level here appeared to be the result this dumping of building debris. This thick deposit may have derived from the restoration at the church in 1849.

Little can be said about the brick structure seen south of the West Tower, though it was probably a burial vault of uncertain date. The few human bones found in the spoil from the trench are typical of such churchyard work, where the digging of burials over the years has moved bones from their original location.

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Bibliography

OAU 1993 *St. Mary's Church, Garsington, Oxon. Archaeological Watching Brief Report.*

OAU 1995 *St. Mary's Church, Garsington, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

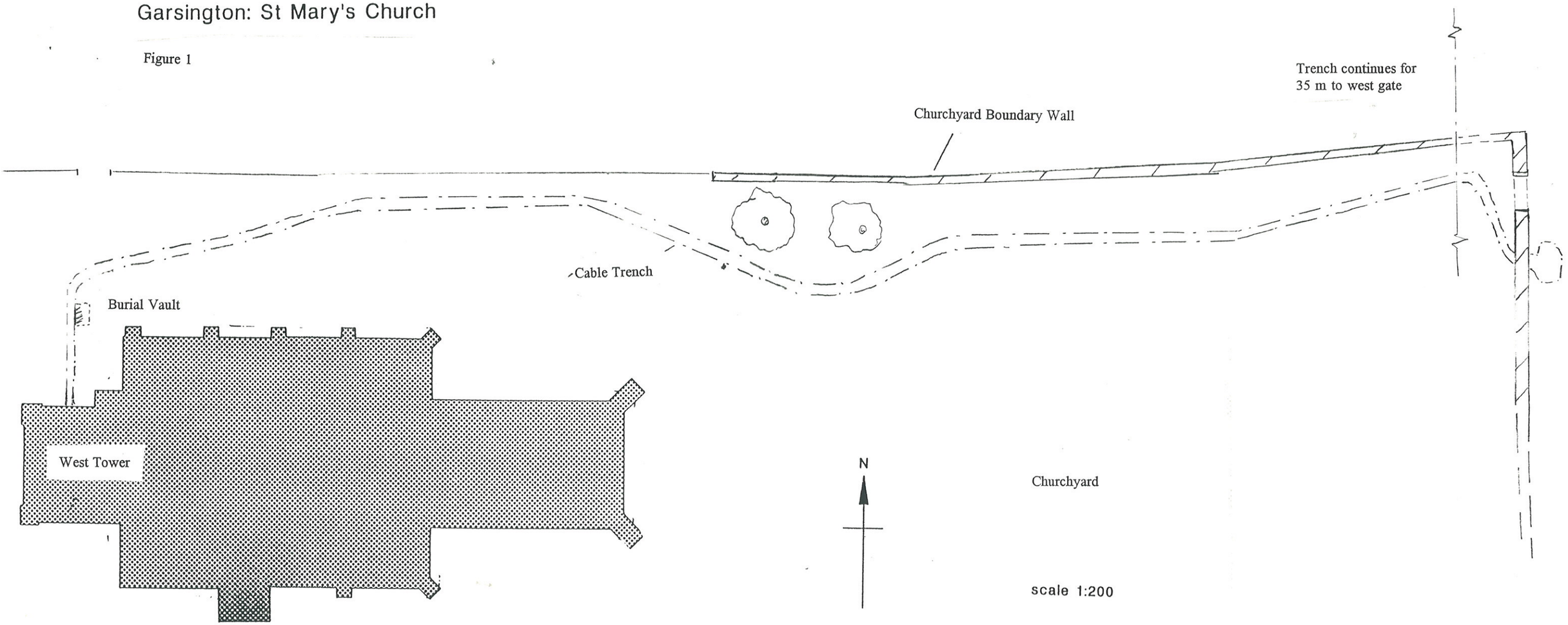
Pevsner N and Sherwood J, 1974 *The Buildings of England, Oxfordshire*

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Comments
1	Layer	0.1 m	1 m	Gravel path south side of churchyard
2	Layer	0.2 m	-	Soil layer beneath path, possibly medieval
3	Layer	0.1 m+	-	Sand, ? natural
4	Layer	0.25 m	-	Building debris south of church, ?1849 restoration
5	Layer	0.12 m	-	Topsoil
6	Layer	0.12 m+	-	Churchyard soil, similar to 2
7	Structure	?0.3 m+	-	Part of brick-built burial vault, undated

Garsington: St Mary's Church

Figure 1



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