

All Saints' Church,
Faringdon, Oxfordshire

NGR SU 2886 9572

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit
June 1996

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, FARINGDON, OXFORDSHIRE
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1 SUMMARY

Victorian brick vaults, an undated grave and possibly re-used medieval masonry were observed during internal works within the south transept of the church. Disarticulated human bones were observed during external excavation for a new drainage trench, but no graves were seen.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief during the summer of 1995 during renovation and structural modification at All Saints Church, Faringdon (Fig. 1). The south transept of the church is being redeveloped as part of the 'ASSET' project (All Saints Enhanced Transept), and is to include an upper room in the transept, a kitchen, a servery, a new reception area, and new toilet facilities. In addition new drainage and telephone facilities were to be installed. The excavation of trenches for these last services was monitored in January 1996. The watching brief was carried out under the recommendation of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. The reordering work was carried out by Whites of Applton Building Contractors Ltd. Plans for the work were drawn up by architects Bartosch and Stokes of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The nave of the church is Norman, and the north transept and chancel of C13 date. The south transept was built by Hugal in 1853 and is the same size as the north transept. Although not observed during this investigation, it seems probable that the medieval transept was dismantled and the Victorian structure built upon the medieval foundations. The crossing tower originally had a spire, which was destroyed during the Civil War in 1646.

4 METHODOLOGY

Four pits were excavated within the south transept (Fig. 2). These were mostly emptied by hand by the contractors, with limited archaeological excavation, particularly in Pit A. Outside the church a drainage trench was excavated by machine away from the south wall of the transept following the line of the present path. The internal holes were issued with the letters A, B, C and D for recording purposes, and each deposit or structure issued with unique context numbers. Layers in the section of the new drainage trench were also numbered. A table of context information appears at the end of this report. It should be noted that lighting conditions in the transept were fairly poor, and distinction of deposits in Holes A-D on the basis of their colour was not easy.

5 RESULTS

5.1 PIT A

Pit A was excavated next to the east wall of the south transept. The pit was 1.0 m wide and 1.10 m long. Natural bedrock (103) was encountered 0.66 m below the church floor. In the south-west corner of the pit was a portion of a grave (102, Fig. 3) up to 0.40 m deep below the level of the bedrock, containing human foot bones (101) and several coffin nails. The bones and coffin nails were not disturbed by the contractors' excavation and were left in situ. The grave was filled with a mixture of grey clay and chalk, including brick fragments (100), which were not retained. The grave fill was indistinguishable from the layer to the north-east of the grave (also 100). This was up to 0.60 m deep and underlay the present concrete floor of the transept. It was assumed that the grave was originally excavated through 100 and backfilled with the same material.

5.2 PIT B

This pit (Fig. 4) was located to the east of the central arcade within the transept, and measured 1.0 m x 1.10 m. At a depth of 0.85 m in the western part of the hole was a row of substantial worked limestone blocks (203), apparently positioned as an unmortared foundation for the circular arcade pier. These blocks, which were left in position, were abutted to the east by the central east-west wall of a two-chambered brick-built burial vault (202). Two wooden coffins with lead seals were observed in the north vault. The vault dates to the Victorian period. Part of the west wall of the vault was removed by the contractors, but no human remains were disturbed. The foundation and the vault were overlaid by a loose rubble layer, 201, which lay below the concrete floor, 200.

5.3 PIT C

This pit was located at the west side of the transept in line with the south wall of the south aisle of the nave, and was 2.40 m north-south and 1.60 m east-west. Excavation went down only 0.35 m, into loose rubble beneath the boarded floor, and no archaeological features were observed.

5.4 PIT D

Pit D was excavated at the south end of the transept towards the south-east corner. It was L-shaped, with maximum north-south and east-west dimensions of c 1.50 m. The trench was excavated entirely through a rubble deposit (similar to 201 in Pit B) beneath the concrete floor, to a depth of 1.20 m. No archaeological remains were present.

5.5 DRAINAGE TRENCH

The trench was excavated by the contractors for the purpose of installing a new drain, pipes for water and telephone cables. A small Kubota mechanical excavator was used for the excavation. The trench was routed through the south transept wall, and turned

Preece, E. n.d. *All Saints' A brief guide to some of the interesting features of All Saints' Church Farningdon*, Farningdon

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

7 REFERENCES

The grave partly exposed in Pit A was not closely dated but the occurrence of brick fragments in its fill suggests that it was dug in the post-medieval period. The brick vaults in Pit B date to the Victorian period. The construction of the south transept also dates to the Victorian period; it is possible that the row of worked limestone blocks at the base of the arcade observed in Pit B are re-used material from the original medieval south transept (assuming that this church had one - no traces of medieval stonework survive here). The presence of human bones from the drainage trench spoil is not entirely unexpected. Graves are often intercut in churchyards, and bones disturbed from their original position. The working of the soil results in bones becoming incorporated into the general churchyard soil. The absence of evidence for grave cuts suggests, however, that the bones did not derive from graves disturbed by the construction of the modern path.

6 CONCLUSIONS

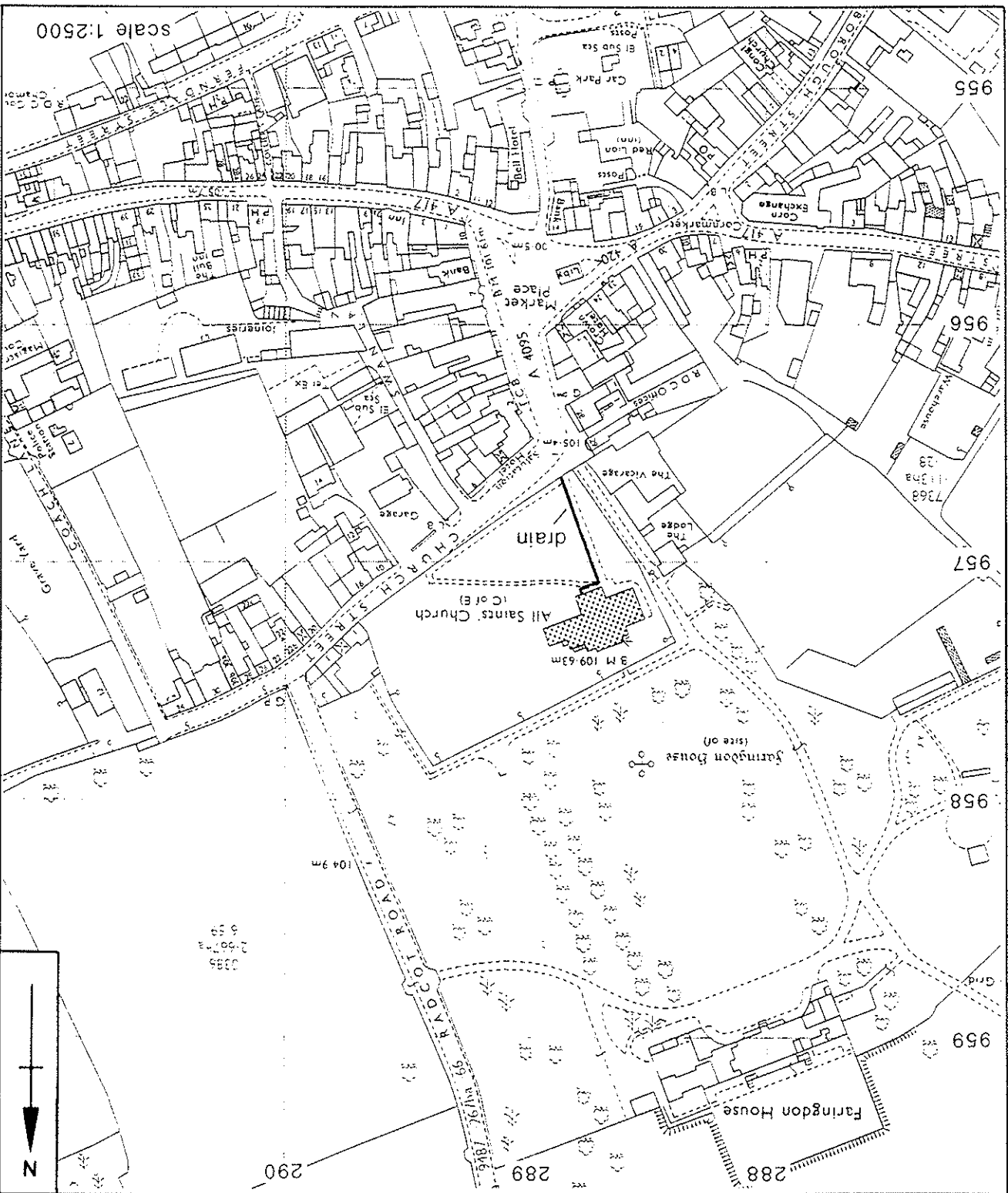
The remainder of the trench was typically 0.83 m deep and 0.36 m wide. The lowest deposit identified in the trench was a mixture of clay and limestone, which was thought to be the natural subsoil (300). At the south end of the trench this deposit was encountered within c. 0.10 m of the top of the excavation. Above 300 was a general layer of mid-dark grey-brown silty clay which included limestone fragments (301, see above). This layer was deepest at the north end of the trench, where it was found throughout the depth of the trench, and became progressively more shallow down the slope to the south to be only c. 0.10 m thick at the south end of the churchyard. Above the soil layer were large concrete slabs (302) which formed the modern path leading to the road from the church. Newspapers which appear to have been used in the mixing process for the concrete slabs indicate a date of c. 1963. No grave cuts or other features were visible in the trench section. No pottery or other objects were recovered from the excavated spoil. Several loose human bones were observed in the spoil, but these were disarticulated and were not collected as they were not from dated contexts.

At the south-west corner of the Littleworth aisle the trench turned due south to extend along the pathway leading to the road (see Fig. 1). The deepest part of the trench was adjacent to the south transept wall, where it was 1.10 m deep and 0.53 m wide. At this point a brick retaining wall (303) formed the upper part of the north side of the trench. The wall was 0.58 m tall and consisted of eight courses of red bricks, the lowest visible course of which was offset. It constituted the south side of a brick-lined drainage channel at the foot of the transept wall. Beneath the base of the wall was a layer of mid-dark grey-brown silty clay which included limestone fragments (301).

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

context	type	depth	width	comments
100	layer	0.65 m	-	general layer below church floor, Victorian
101	skeleton	-	-	Toe bones of E-W aligned human skeleton in grave cut 102
102	grave	0.90 m+	0.50 m+	Grave cut filled by skeleton 101 and general soil layer 100
103	layer	-	-	natural bedrock
200	layer	0.12 m	-	concrete base, church floor
201	layer	0.85 m	-	similar to 100, loose rubble - Victorian
202	structure	0.60 m+	1.10 m+	Victorian brick-built burial vault
203	structure	0.40 m	0.40 m	Re-used medieval stone, below arcade pier base
300	layer	0.28 m+	-	bedrock and subsoil
301	layer	0.10 - 0.83 m	-	churchyard soil
302	layer	0.10	0.60 m	concrete slabs/church path
303	brick wall	0.58 m	-	Victorian drainage channel

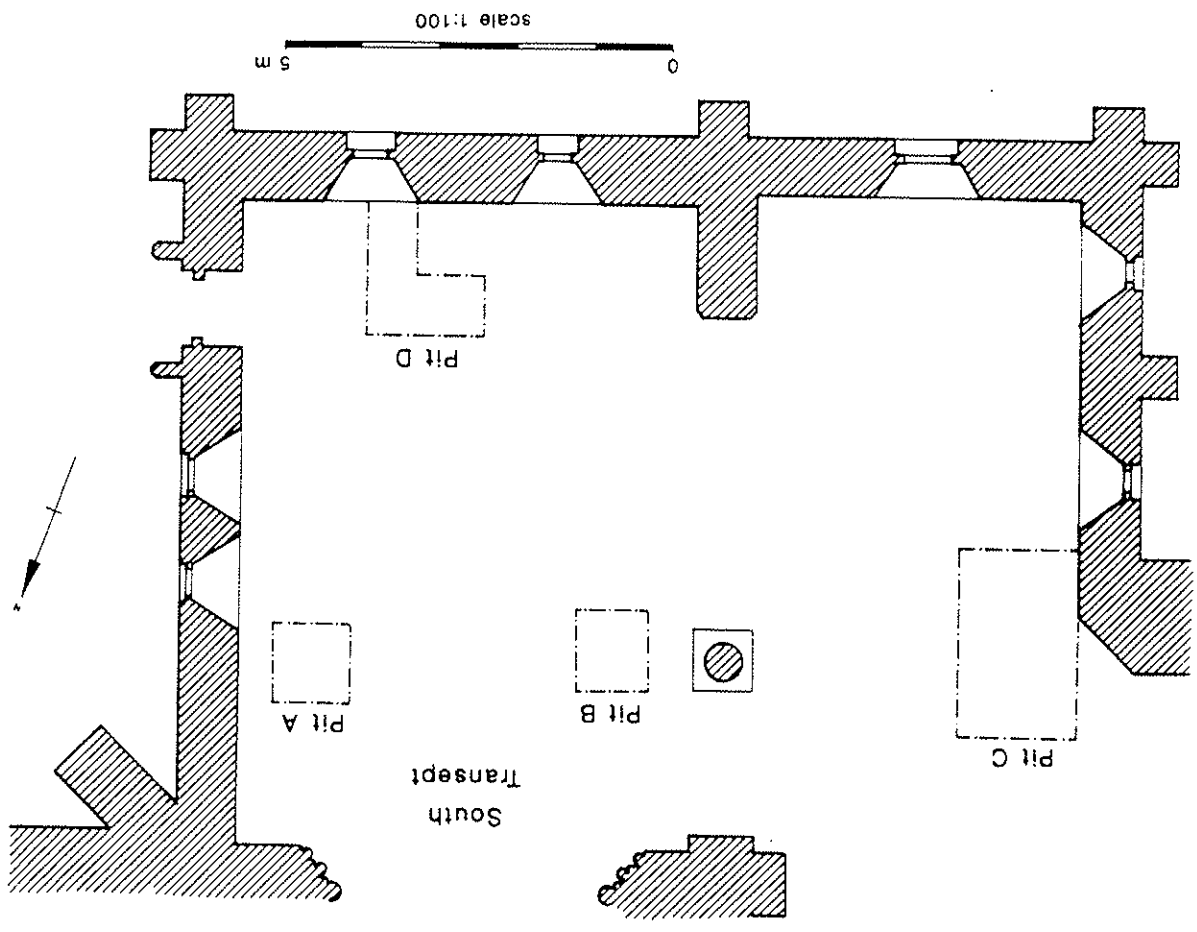
J. Hillier
OAU
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Figure 1

Figure 2



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Plan of pit locations A - D

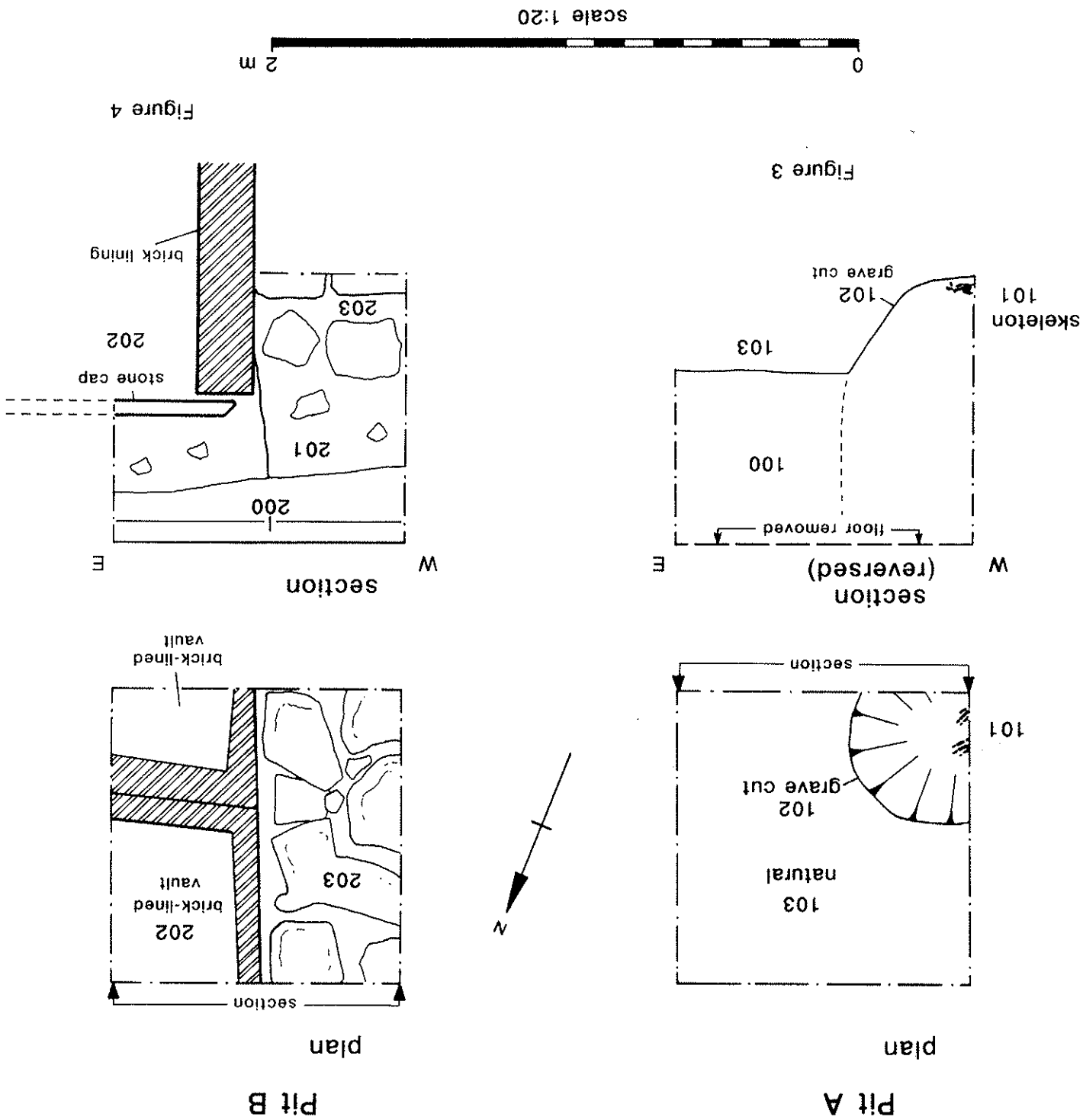


Figure 4

Figure 3

Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.
The Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited. Registered Charity Number: 285627
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Office: 46 Hythe Bridge Street



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, OX1 2EP
Head Office Tel: 01865 243888 Fax: 01865 793496
Post-Excavation Tel: 01865 204642 Fax: 01865 204637

