

GARSINGTON. CHURCH OF St. MARY. GSM 92.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned to undertake a watching brief at the Church of St. Mary, Garsington, Oxon. (SP458203), during repairs to the early 19th century floor in the Nave and N and S Aisles. This entailed the removal of six areas of wooden floor, and underlying material to a depth of 0.30m, and its replacement by hardcore, a concrete screed, and floor tiles complementary to the existing tiled areas.

The earliest part of the existing church is the mid-12th century Tower. The Nave was built in 1225, and the Chancel in 1250. Until 1392 the church belonged to the Abbots of Abingdon.

The site was visited on four occasions between October 20th and November 10th 1992, as each area was excavated by the contractors and before its backfilling.

DESCRIPTION

Under the removed wooden floor (1) was a layer of make-up (2), comprising crushed rubble, mortar, gravel, and a few tile fragments, to an average depth of 0.12m. This layer extended under the existing tiled areas (3). Removed with this material was a modern brick culvert (9), running approximately N-S across the Nave. In the NE Nave trench the brick foundation support (8) for a late-Victorian coal-burning stove was partially revealed, cut through layer (2). It is known that the stove was in use as part of the heating system until 1934.

Six modern graves were revealed during the removal of layer (2). Graves (11), (16), (19), and (20) were indicated by 'in situ' carved grave slabs, although the slabs of (16) and (20) were partly cut away by, respectively, modern heating pipes and the brick culvert (9). Grave (11) bore the inscribed family name of Sadler, and a latest date of 1791. The tops of all four slabs were approximately 0.12m below the present floor surface. (12) was a well constructed brick-lined grave, surmounted by a rough stone slab. The E end of the slab had been broken, possibly during the construction of the culvert (9). Removal of the broken piece revealed a wooden coffin, the style of decoration of which suggested an early 19th century date. Grave (14), partly revealed in the SE Nave trench, was noticeable for a layer of rough limestone blocks set into the top fill of the grave cut.

Immediately to the E of the stove base (8), and pre-dating it, the top of a brick-built barrel vault (10), was partially revealed, extending N, S, and E beyond the trench limits, and sealed by a layer of dark brown silty clay, with small stone and gravel inclusions, presumably re-deposited natural subsoil.

Finds recovered from layer (2) included fragments of re-deposited human bone, and fragments of 14th or 15th century inlaid and plain floor tiles. In the N Aisle trench most of a broken white marble wall plaque was found, dating to 1791. In the S.E. Nave trench were found two fragments of limestone moulding from a late medieval capital, and one fragment of moulding from a tomb memorial. The stone mouldings and the best examples of the floor tiles were left in the care of the Rector, for future display.



Beneath layer (2) was a fairly uniform layer of mid-brown sandy silt (4), between 0.05 and 0.08m deep. This overlay four possible graves (13), (15), (18), and (21), each oriented W-E and partially or fully revealed as rectangular cuts filled with loose mid-brown sandy silt, with rubble and decayed mortar inclusions. At the E end of grave (15) was a partially revealed unworked slab, which possibly extended over the entire grave.

In the NW Nave trench, (Sections 1. 2. 3.), layer (4) overlay a composite layer, up to 0.10m deep, of mid-brown sandy silt with thin lenses of pale cream decayed mortar (5). In the S section of the NE Nave trench a layer of partly worked limestone slabs (6) was revealed, under layer (4). This layer did not extend into the trench and was apparently truncated to the E by the culvert (9) (Section 4).

Elsewhere, (4) overlay a partially excavated layer of pale brown sandy silt with decayed mortar and stone inclusions (30), up to 0.10m deep. In the S. Aisle this layer was considerably less deep, and almost non-existent at the W and E ends of the Aisle. Where layer (30) was removed, a layer of mid/pale brown sandy silt, with small stone and gravel inclusions was revealed (7). No finds were recovered from this layer.

Layer (7) was cut by features (17), (21), (22), (23), (24), (25), (26), (27), and (28), which, being sealed by layer (30), were located by selective excavation and augering. Their fills were very similar to (30), but with a much higher proportion of rubble and large stone blocks. These features had vertically cut sides, where definable, but it was not possible to ascertain their depth. No finds were recovered from any of the fills.

Under each pier of the N and S arcade the removal of (30) revealed that the pier base foundation consisted of rough worked limestone blocks, mortared, and faced to the N and S only.

#### INTERPRETATION

By comparison with the more obviously redeposited natural of the layer sealing the vault (10), it would appear that layer (7) represents an early levelling layer over the whole site. (21), (22), (23), (24), (25), (26), (27), and possibly (17), are characteristic of robbed-out and backfilled wall trenches, remains of at least one pre-1225 phase of building. This conclusion is reinforced by the retention of parts of the early foundations (29) abutting (23), (25), (26), and (27) as bases for the arcade piers. The considerable N-S dimension of (26) may be due to it being a robber trench with a later grave cut immediately to the N of it. (22) appears to represent the wall of an early, narrow N Aisle. The area of robbing (28), although having no clear edge, suggests by its position, an early S porch.

Layer (30) is apparently a demolition layer associated with the robber trenches. Although (6) might be seen as the remains of an early medieval flagged floor, overlying (30), its confined area, and relatively rough surface would argue against this interpretation. The ubiquitous layer (4) does appear to have been the bedding layer for a flagged and/or tiled floor, a possibility reinforced by the tile fragments found in the overlying layer (2). (5) may represent repair patches or construction trample.

The floor surface that would have lay on top of (4) would presumably have finished at the level indicated by the top of the

uncovered grave slabs (11), (16), (19), and (20). When the floor was raised in the early 19th century, these slabs were left 'in situ'. It is possible that grave (12) was originally surmounted by a worked grave slab, which was removed for safe keeping and replaced with the rough slab as found. Similarly the rough slabs in grave (14) may have been supports for a grave slab, also removed at the time of the floor raising.

It is known that the Chancel arch was rebuilt at about the same time as the floor was raised in the 19th century; the limestone capital moulding may possibly derive from the replaced arch.

#### CONCLUSION

Although the limits of the excavated area, and the lack of finds from the earlier features preclude any definite conclusions on layout or date, two possible phases of an earlier church can be tentatively suggested. (Plan 2):

Phase 1: An early Norman/late Saxon Nave with a W Tower and possibly an apsidal E end.

Phase 2: The mid-12th century extension of the Nave to its present size, and the consequent rebuilding of the Tower as it stands today: the construction of an arcade on the line of the N Nave wall, opening to a N Aisle, and the construction of a porch on the S side of the Nave. It is not unusual for there to have been no corresponding Aisle on the S side of the nave at this time.

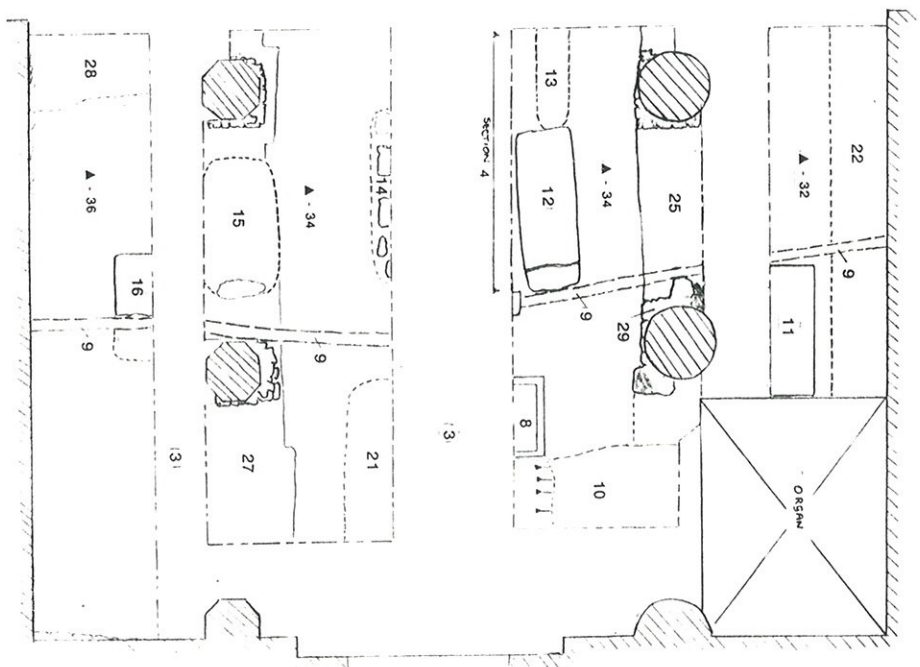
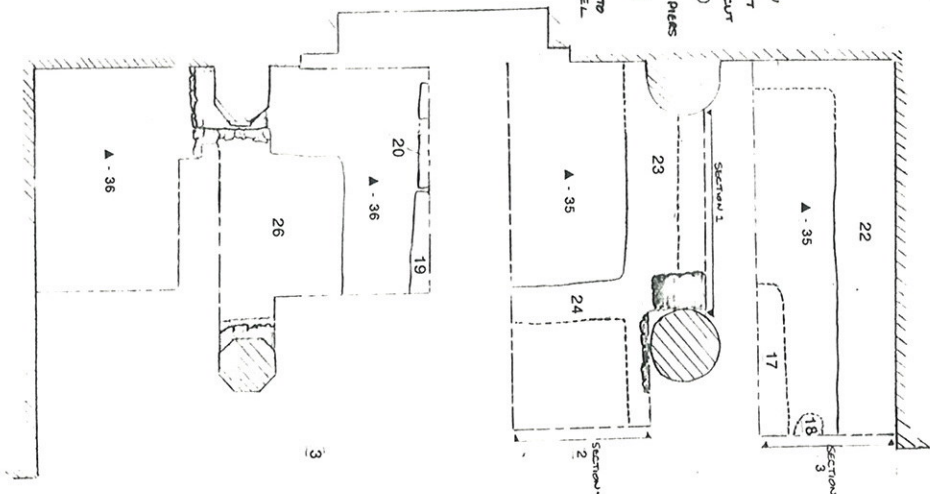
Alan Hardy.  
OAU 1992



SPRINGTON. CHURCH OF ST MARY GSM 42  
 PLAN 1 SCALE 1:100.

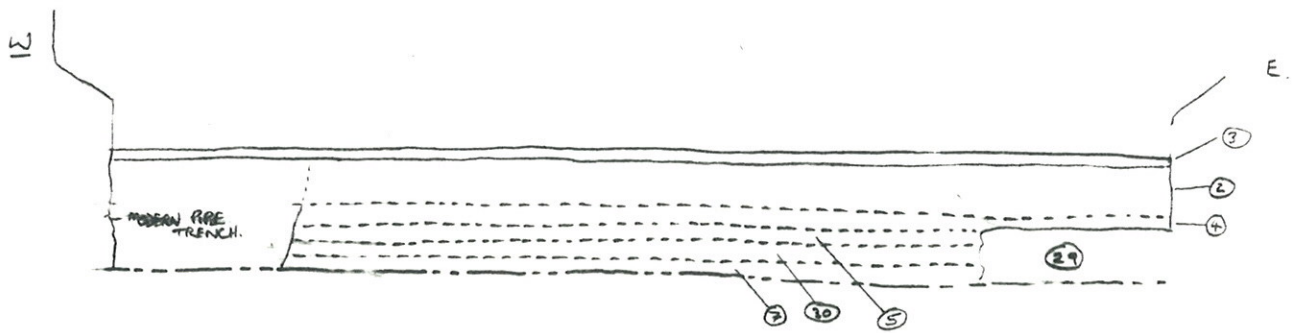


- LIMIT OF EXCAVATION
- DEFINITE EDGE OF CUT
- INDEFINITE EDGE OF CUT
- LINE OF CLAVELT
- EXISTING WALLS AND PIERS
- PILE FOUNDATIONS (29)
- ▲ SPOT HEIGHTS RELATIVE TO PRESENT FLOOR LEVEL

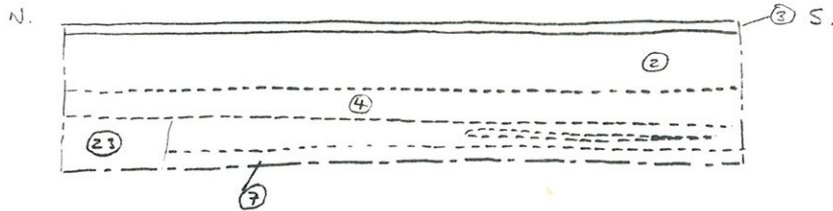


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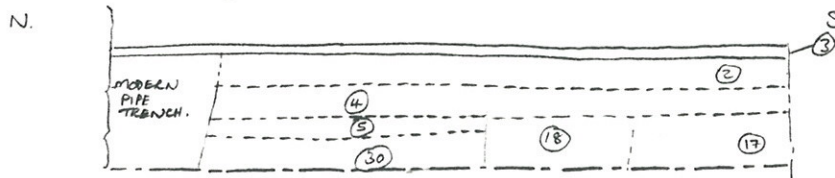
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SCALE 1:20



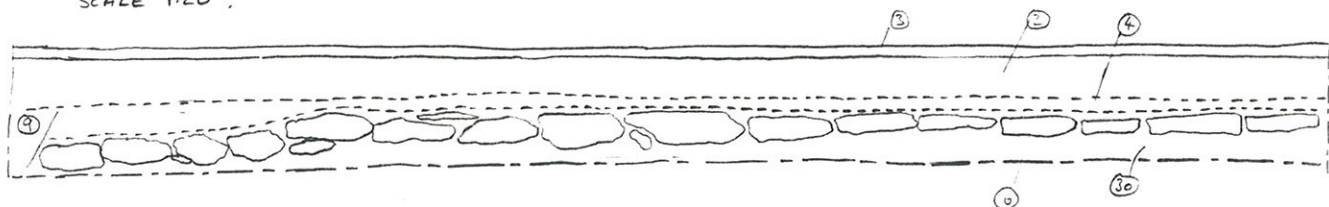
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SECTION No 3  
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SECTION No 4  
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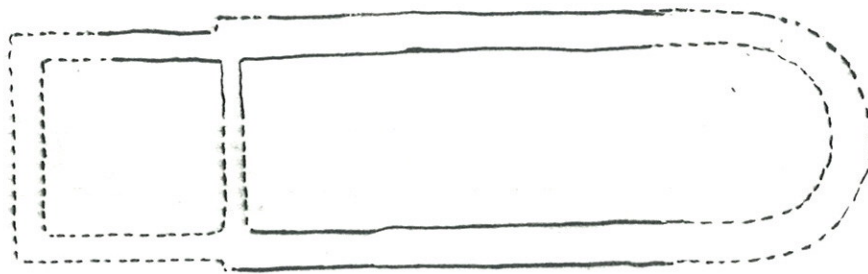


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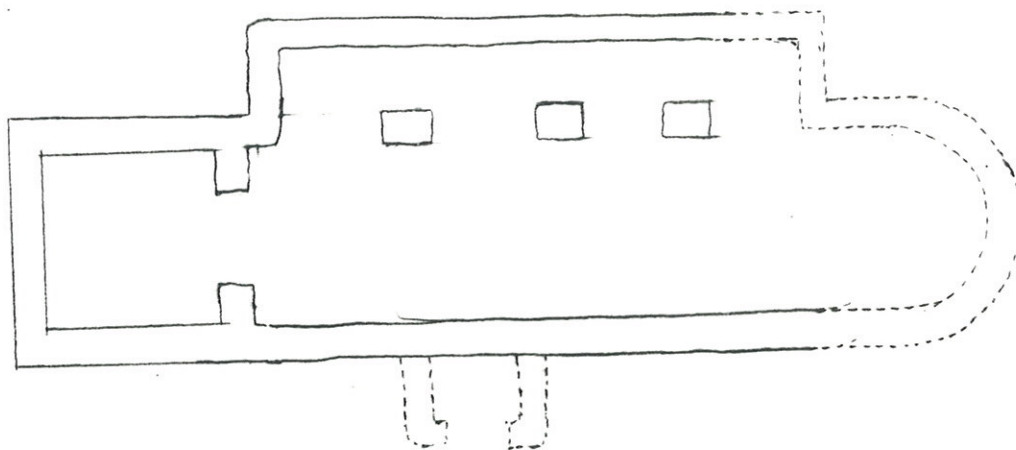
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POSSIBLE EARLY DEVELOPMENT.

PHASE 1



PHASE 2



===== EXISTING, ESTABLISHED, OR INFERRED WALLS

----- CONJECTURED WALLS