

St Mary's Church Aldworth West Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



November 2006

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Cover Plate: View of church and graveyard from the north by Geoff Fletcher

SUMMARY

In November 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Aldworth, West Berkshire (NGR SU 554 794). The work was commissioned by Mr Michael Soames of the Parochial Church Council in advance of construction of new surface drains around north and west walls of the church. The watching brief revealed a number of graves on north side of church and pathway on the west side of church.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In November 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Aldworth, West Berkshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Michael Soames of the Parochial Church Council in respect of the construction of new surface drains around north and west walls of the church.
- 1.1.2 A brief was agreed with Julian Munby, Diocesan Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese Advisory Council (DAC).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on Upper Chalk at 150 m above OD. The site is situated on the western side of the village just to the south-west of the village centre.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The Church nave and chancel dates from the early 14th century, even though the tower is thought to be earlier. The south aisle of the church is wider and dates to the late 14th century. The church holds one of the richest collections of 14th century effigies of the de la Beche family, consisting of six knights and three ladies. A re-dedication to the altar dating to 1315, could refer to one of the monuments in the church (*Pevsner and Sherwood, 1974, 63-4*).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The drains against the wall were excavated first so that the walls could be re-pointed. The drains running out into the graveyard were then excavated. These were all done by hand and carried out under archaeological supervision.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:150 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits (*Figs. 2 and 3*)

- 3.1.1 The drainage channel around the north and west side of the church was 0.45 m wide and dug to a depth of 0.45 m from below the church floor level. On the north side this cut into the natural chalk (3) at 0.7 m below ground level. This was sealed below a 0.4 m to 0.5 m thick layer of disturbed graveyard soil of reddish brown silty clay (2) with chalk. This had been cut by five graves (5) partly exposed in the drain trenches but the burials lay below impact level. The graves had vertical sides and measured 0.4 m long, 0.40 - 0.45 m wide and were cut to a depth of 0.9 m with a fill of light reddish brown silty clay (6) with chalk backfill. One of the graves just north of the tower had a small foot stone (10) laid on its back on the grave, which dated to 1821.
- 3.1.2 On the west side of the church overlying the disturbed graveyard soil (2) was a compacted chalk and gravel path (4) leading from the south door to the graveyard at the rear of the church. These features had all been sealed by a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay loam (1) topsoil.
- 3.1.3 Along the wall faces the trenches exposed the foundations of the church. These had been exposed during the re-pointing and construction of the tower buttresses in the 19th century during restoration work. The remains of a brick drain against the north church wall was exposed and a 0.20 m thick foundation (8) of trench filled mortar and flint rubble. The foundation (9) on the west side of the tower was different with a 0.10 m wide off set and 0.20 m flint and mortar construction similar to the wall (7) above.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief and any chancel remains were reburied on site.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief revealed a number of features relating to the layout of the graveyard to the west and north of the church. A number of graves along side the north wall of the church were exposed. The burials of these were below the level of impact of the drain and untouched. The markers for these graves had been removed at some point or laid down over the grave. A small foot stone dating to 1821 was exposed laying just under the topsoil and over a grave. On the west side of the church a old chalk and gravel path leading from the church's south porch around the tower to the grave yard at the rear of the church was exposed in three of the drain trenches. The drain against the north and west walls revealed the base of the walls had been uncovered and re-pointed during the construction of the 19th century buttresses of the tower.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Layer	0.20 m			Topsoil
2	Layer	0.40 m			Graveyard soil
3	Natural				Natural chalk with flint
4	Layer	0.12 m	1.10 m		Pathway
5	Cut	0.90 m	0.40 m	0.40 m	Grave cuts
6	Fill				Fill of graves
7	Structure				North wall of church
8	Structure	0.25 m			Footing of north wall and tower
9	Structure	0.20 m	0.10 m		Footing of west wall of tower
10	Foot stone	0.05 m	0.45 m	0.90 m	Foot stone

APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, first edition, 1992)

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

APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Mary's Church, Aldworth, West Berkshire

Site code: ALDCSM 06

Grid reference: NGR SU 554 794

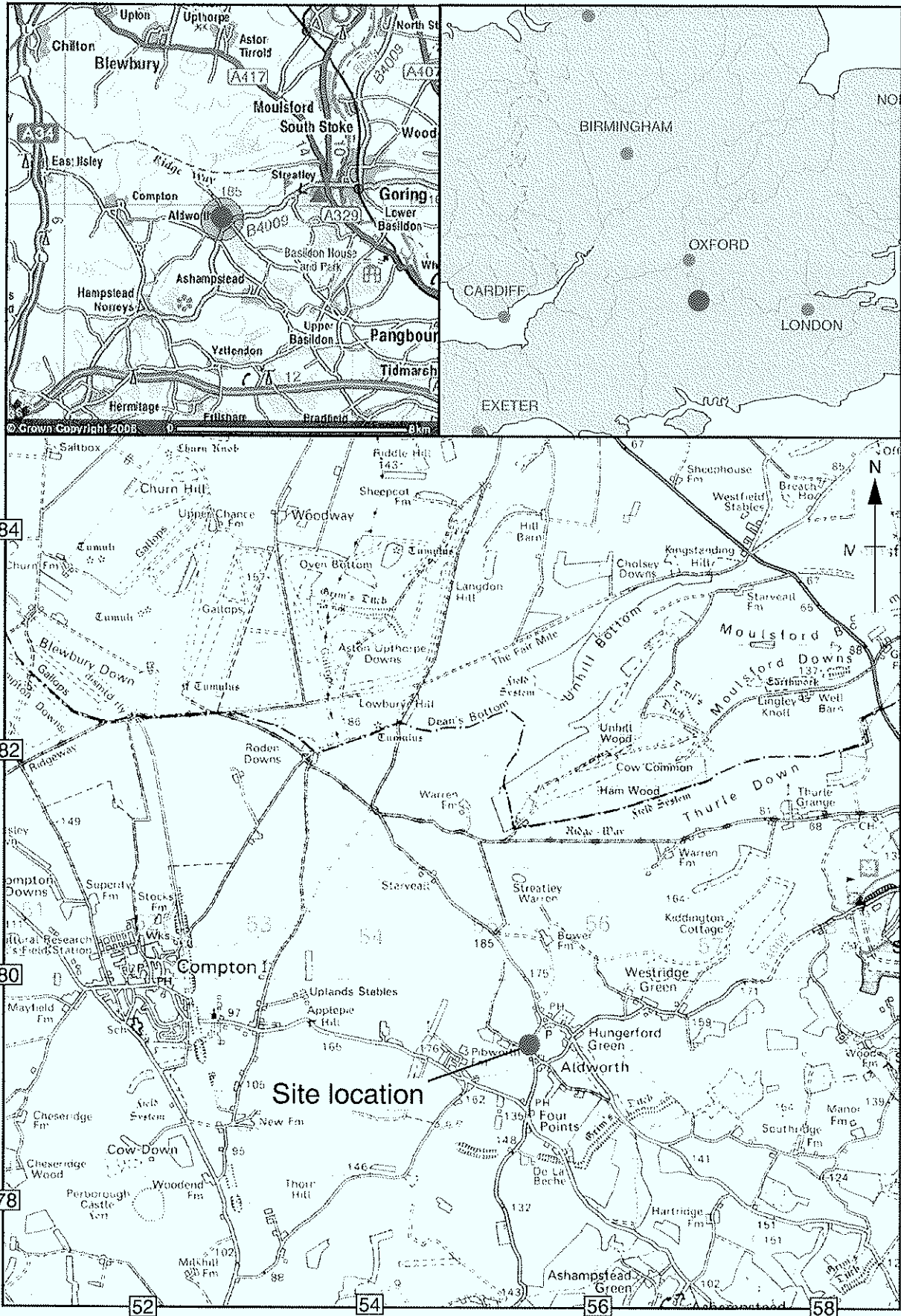
Type of watching brief: New drains along north and west walls.

Date and duration of project: Three site visits from the 6th November to 8th November 2006.

Area of site: 18.5 m x 0.45 m drain against the wall and five 4 m long x 0.4 m wide soak away drains.

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed a number of graves on north side of church and pathway on west side of church.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with West Berkshire Heritage Service in due course, under the following accession number: NEBYM: 2006.64



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Figure 1: Site location

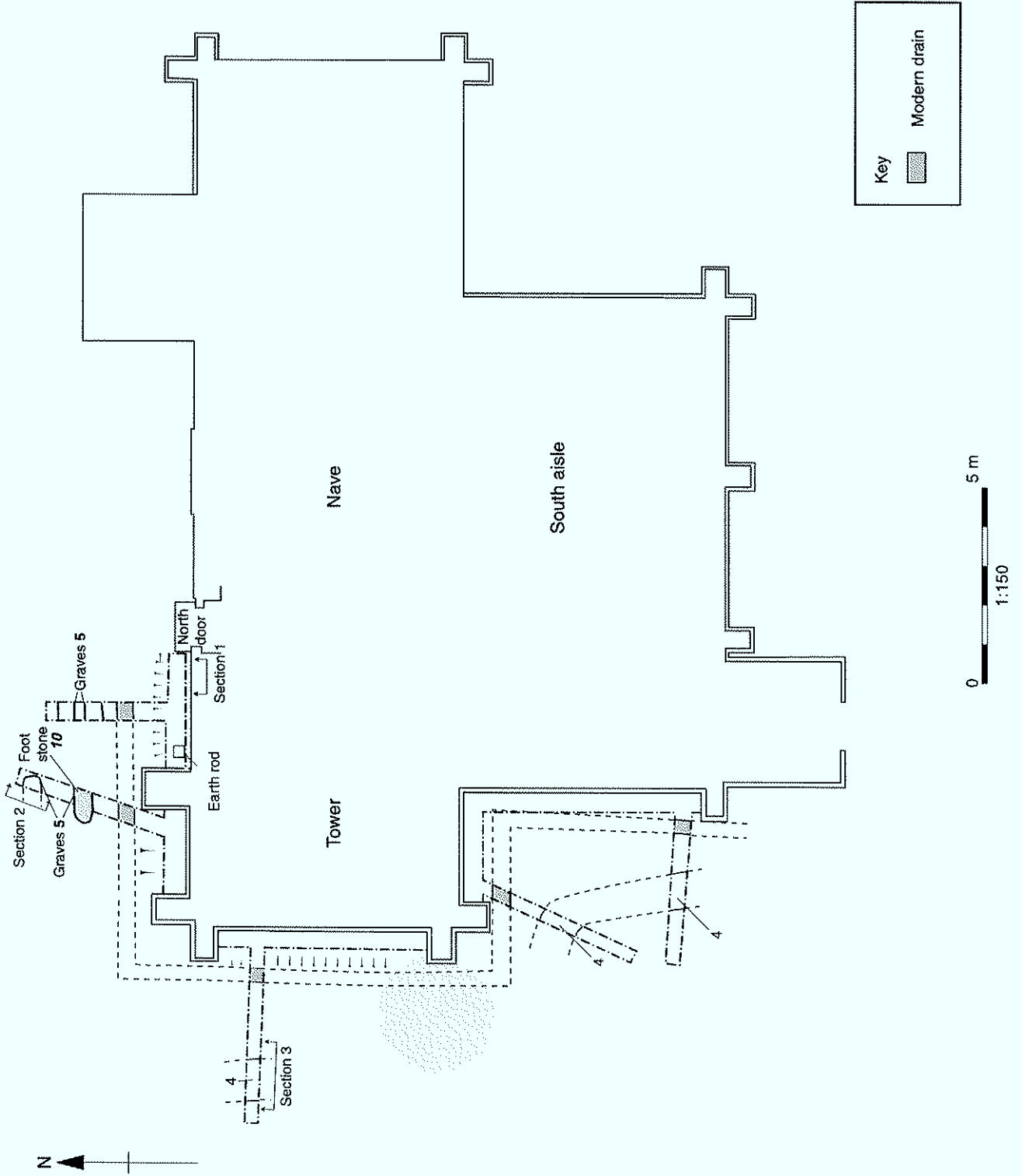
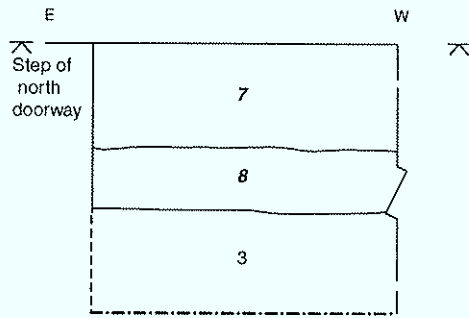


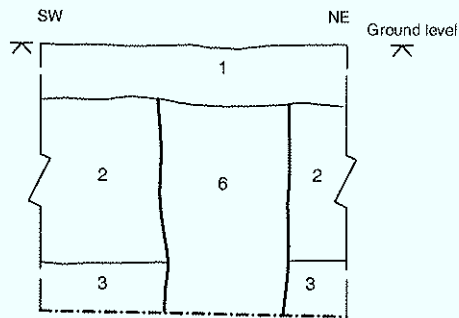
Figure 2: Site plan



Section 1



Section 2



Section 3

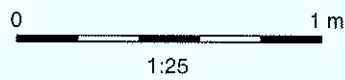
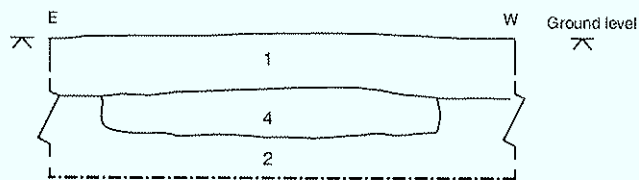


Figure 3: Sections



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