

**St Thomas of Canterbury Church,
Goring, Oxfordshire**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
INTERIM STATEMENT***

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SUMMARY

On the 15th and 16th of December 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological evaluation consisting of 5 test pits at St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Goring, Oxfordshire (NGR: ~~SP~~^{SU} 5977 8072). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects in advance of the proposed lowering of the church floor. The watching brief revealed details of the construction of the church, deposits of made ground associated with post-medieval refurbishment of the church and evidence for burials within the north aisle and eastern end of the nave.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 On the 15th and 16th of December 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological Evaluation at St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Goring, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 5977 8072). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects, in respect of a proposal to lower the church floor.

1.1.2 A project brief was set by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (Julian Munby) requiring that 5-6 test pits be dug down to impact level in locations dispersed across the nave and north aisle of the church. These pits would provide a representative sample of the current position for deposit survival, information that would be used to formulate a mitigation strategy during floor reduction.

1.2 Archaeological and historical background

1.2.1 The archaeological and historical background is detailed in the Archaeological Desk Based Assessment (DBA) (OA 2008). The following is an abridged summary of that assessment.

Summary

1.2.2 The church of St Thomas of Canterbury was originally founded in the early 12th-century and consisted of a west tower, an aisleless nave and a chancel with an apsidal east end. Later in the century an Augustinian priory was founded on the site. The nuns built their own church as an extension of the parish church. The apse was demolished and a wall with a doorway in its north-east angle was built dividing the two churches. In approximately 1200 a north aisle was built alongside the nave and the arches of the arcade cut into three of the original windows. In the 14th century the aisle windows were replaced and a porch and doorway were added in the 15th century.

1.2.3 At the dissolution the priory church was destroyed and the wall formerly dividing the two churches became the east wall of the parish church. In 1887 the present east apse was re-erected on the old foundations.

1.3 Methodology

- 1.3.1 The evaluation consisted of the hand excavation of five test pits, measuring on average 1.2 m square, down to the proposed depth of impact (0.5 m below current floor level).

2 RESULTS

2.1 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1

- 2.1.1 Test pit 1 was located in the arcade separating the nave from the north aisle, immediately east of the westernmost pillar.
- 2.1.2 In the north-west corner of the test pit the truncated remains of the original north wall of the church were exposed at 0.2 m below floor level, below the northern half of the western pillar. The wall had been truncated below the depth of 0.5 m in the remainder of the pit. Butting up to this, and encountered at a depth of 0.45 m, was a compacted layer of pale grey-brown silt, probably the demolition layer associated with the truncation of the north wall.
- 2.1.3 Built directly upon this layer and running over the truncated wall was a brick plinth supporting the end pillar. This was constructed using machine made red brick of a mid to late 19th-century date. Between 0.1 m and 0.45 m below ground level a series of made ground containing brick fragments were observed butting up to the brick plinth were and which are probably contemporary with the brick plinth. In the area of the nave the floor was constructed using 0.3 m square red tiles, while in the north aisle a layer of "terrazzo" had been laid.

Test Pit 2

- 2.1.4 Test pit 2 was located at the eastern end of the nave.
- 2.1.5 A probable original soil horizon was encountered at a depth of 0.45 m below the current floor level. Within the north-east corner of the test pit this was cut by a rectangular vertical sided feature, aligned east-west. This feature was filled by a light brown silty clay containing chalk and brick fragments and some human charnel, indicative of grave fill. Sealing this feature and measuring between 0.18 m and 0.4 m below floor level was a layer of made ground containing chalk blocks, brick and tile fragments and which produced a fragment of 19th-century clay pipe stem. The concrete bed for the wooden parquet flooring had been laid directly upon this deposit.

Test Pit 3

- 2.1.6 Test pit 3 was located in the north aisle close to the porch.
- 2.1.7 A series of four barrel vaulted shaft burials were exposed at the base of this test pit, the highest point of which was encountered at a level of 0.3 m below floor level. It could be seen that the vaulting in one burial overlapped the one immediately east of it, however the relationship between the other burials is unclear. The size of the bricks used suggest that they are all of an 18th-century date. A small stub wall, a probable floor support for an earlier phase of wooden floor, had been built directly upon the vaulting. The vaults were sealed by a loose grey-brown silt containing brick fragments similar to those used for the vaults. The brick walls supporting the current wooden floor had been built directly upon this deposit.

Test Pit 4

- 2.1.8 Test Pit 4 was located against the south-west corner of the nave, adjacent to the central aisle.
- 2.1.9 A layer of compacted pale grey silt was encountered at a depth of 0.55 m below the current floor level. This contained much mortar flecking and fragments of chalk and may represent a construction layer similar to that encountered in Test Pit 1. This was overlain by made ground, probably post medieval in date, up to a level of 0.2 m below the current floor. A construction cut for the heating duct under the central aisle of the nave had been dug through these layers. This was built using the same red machine made bricks as those used in the brick pillar support in Test Pit 1 and may be part of the same phase of refurbishment. Modern cement pads supporting the present day wooden floor were also observed.

Test Pit 5

- 2.1.10 This was located in the south-east part of the nave, close to the pulpit.
- 2.1.11 The stratigraphy exposed within this pit was similar to that in Test Pit 4 with layers of 19th-century made ground observed down to a depth of 0.6 m below the current floor level. A trench containing a brick built heating duct was also exposed. The bricks used to construct this were similar to those in Test Pit 4 and it is probable that this duct is part of the same, earlier system. This duct had been partially demolished and filled in probably when the current wooden floor and the later hot water central heating system were installed.

2.2 Finds

- 2.2.1 Fragments of charnel were recovered from Test Pits 2, 3 and 5. Post medieval brick and tile were recovered from all the pits. Two fragments of glazed floor tile were recovered from pits 3 and 5, although these were collected from post-medieval deposits and are therefore probably residual.

3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1.1 Inhumations were only encountered in the north aisle and the north-eastern edge of the nave. Within the southern edge and western end of the nave only post-medieval deposits were encountered down to the impact depth, c0.5m – 0.55m below floor level. This is presumably the result of the installation of the heating ducts under the nave in the 19th-century. No evidence for earlier floor levels associated with the Norman or Medieval church were encountered. The fragments of glazed floor tile recovered came from 19th-century deposits of made ground and are presumed to be residual. The glazed tiles on display in the vestry came from the priory excavations in the 1890s and it may be that only the priory had such floors rather than the parish Church.
- 3.1.2 Evidence for the survival of part of the original north wall of the church was observed below the western pillar of the arcade at a depth of 0.2 m below floor level, although it is apparent that the wall had been truncated below the depth of impact elsewhere in the test pit.
- 3.1.3 It is probable that the proposed reduction in floor level will only impact upon post-medieval deposits within the south and west of the nave. Within the east of the nave and the north aisle evidence of burials was encountered at a depth of approximately 0.3 m below floor level in both pits, although no articulated remains were observed. This suggests that the lowering of the floor level in these areas will encounter further burials. The depth of any such inhumations would have to be established before any further reduction continued.
- 3.1.4 The presence of the truncated north wall within Test Pit 1 also suggests that early structural components of the church may survive.
- 3.1.5 The potential for the disturbance of burials and exposure of earlier structural evidence for the church and its relationship to the priory is such that an experienced archaeologist would need to be on site during the reduction of the floor level to record any structures and establish the depth of any inhumations.
- 3.1.6 The density of archaeological deposits exposed during the test pitting suggests that a requirement for full excavation is not necessary and that the archaeological implications can be best dealt with as a watching brief.

