

St Thomas of Canterbury Church

Goring on Thames
Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



September 2008

Client: Acanthus Clews Architects

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NGR: SU 59765 80715

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SUMMARY

In May 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during ground works in the churchyard of St Thomas of Canterbury, Goring, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 59765 80715). The works comprised the digging of one geotechnical test pit to assess soil quality. The watching brief revealed deposits relating to churchyard management and burial activity, but no other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In May 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during intrusive groundworks in the churchyard of St Thomas of Canterbury, Goring, Oxfordshire (NGR: : SU 59765 80715). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects.

1.1.2 The groundworks involved the digging of one 1 m x 0.6 m geotechnical test pit. This was in order that engineers, Hannah Reed Construction, could assess the soil quality in advance of a proposed extension to the south side of the Church.

1.1.3 The watching brief was requested by The Diocesan Archaeological Adviser, Julian Munby, and Oxfordshire's County Archaeologist, Paul Smith.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The parish church of St Thomas of Canterbury lies near the centre of the village of Goring-on-Thames, on a gravel terrace on the east bank of the River Thames (NGR SU 59765 80715).

1.2.2 The archaeological background to the site is detailed in a WSI that was prepared for an evaluation of the churchyard (OA, 2007), and is reproduced below.

1.2.3 The early 12th century church consisted of a western tower, an aisleless nave, and a chancel with an apsidal east end. Later in the 12th century an Augustinian nunnery, Goring Priory, was founded on the site, and the nuns built their own church as an extension of the original church, probably in the early 13th century (Sherwood and Pevsner 1974). The apsidal east end of the original church was demolished when this new church (the Church of St Mary) was built to the east.

1.2.4 The Church of St Mary and the rest of the priory was demolished after the Dissolution in 1536, leaving only the original west part of the church in place. This has continued in use as the parish church to the present day. The wall, formerly dividing the two churches, became the east wall of the parish church (Sherwood and Pevsner 1974). Excavation in 1886 revealed the original apse footings, and the apse was reinstated by building alterations soon afterwards.

- 1.2.5 A local resident, Percy Stone, undertook a series of wall-chasing excavations in and adjacent to the churchyard, and by locating many below-ground walls, he was able to compile a comprehensive plan of the priory (Carleton Williams 1987, 19). Elements of the priory complex that were located within the current churchyard appear to have included the church, hospitum, a guest house, kitchens, a cellarum, cloisters, an infirmary and the prioress' lodgings. Further buildings have been identified to the north of the churchyard at Mill Cottage. Walls of the Infirmary appear to have extended beyond the southern limit of the churchyard into the grounds of Fernleigh to the south.
- 1.2.6 In the present southern churchyard, within the footprint of the proposed development, Stone identified the west-east orientated north walk of the cloister or ambulatory, and the north-south orientated wall delimiting the western extent of the cloister garth. In 2001 a programme of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) scanning undertaken by Stratascan confirmed anomalies consistent Stone's plan of these two walls. They also identified several other anomalies that they interpreted as possible unmarked graves (Barker and Tomkinson 2001).
- 1.2.7 In the same year OA undertook a small evaluation within the churchyard (OA 2001). Trenches 1 (measuring 1 m x 2 m x 0.97 m maximum depth) and 3 (measuring 0.3 m x 2.68 m x 0.8 m maximum depth) were located within the footprint of the proposed development. A substantial north-south aligned wall of chalk stone, flint nodules, dressed stone fragments and building tile fragments set in a yellow sandy mortar (measuring 1 m in width and at least 2 m long) was discovered in Trench 1. This was consistent with the western limit of the cloister garth identified by Stone and by GPR. The wall had been partially robbed out, and the cut of the robber trench was identified 0.3- 0.5 m below the present ground surface. No graves or human remains (even charnel) were identified in this trench. In Trench 3 an east-west aligned wall of chalk stone blocks and flint nodules bonded with sandy mortar was identified at approximately 0.5 m below the present ground surface. The wall ran the full width of the northern part of the trench, was 0.85 m wide and survived to at least 0.3 m in height. A possible robber trench was also identified. The wall corroborates Stone's findings and the GPR survey, and appears to be the southern wall of the cloister. In addition, a vertical sided feature was noted in the southernmost extent of Trench 3. Although no human remains were seen, this was interpreted as a grave. The cut of the possible grave was visible in the subsoil to a depth of 0.12 m below the present ground surface.
- 1.2.8 Two other archaeological watching briefs within or immediately adjacent to the proposed development include an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Wessex Archaeology in 1992 (Wessex Archaeology 1992) and another by OA in 1994 (OA 1994). The former was conducted during excavation of foundation trenches for the southern extension to the tower (comprising a cloakroom and kitchen) and an associated drain run for the sewer. A wall foundation of the priory complex (possible walls of Stone's prioress' lodgings) and five probable medieval burials were recorded. The latter were not located in the southern churchyard, however, and only

one fragment of charnel attested to burial within this area. This included the drain run, the inspection chamber (ISP 4), and the cloakroom extension site. The drain run was dug to a depth of 0.3- 0.6 m, ISP 4 to a depth of 0.73 m, and the cloakroom foundations to 0.2 m. The five articulated burials were located in the north-western churchyard (ISP 1 and 2).

- 1.2.9 OA's 1994 watching brief followed the course of drainage ditches along the exterior of the southern and western church walls, and hence, was located within the footprint of the proposed extension. No significant deposits were identified in the 0.4 m wide and 0.25-0.35 m deep trench.

Other archaeological investigations in the southern churchyard include recording action by John Moore Heritage Services in 2001 and 2003. The former located the probable walls of Stone's hospitem, guest house and necessaria, or possibly the western wall of the 'open yard'. In the 2003 works, three undated inhumations were discovered during the digging of small pits close to the churchyard wall to the south-east of the proposed development. These inhumations lay no deeper than 0.5 m below the present ground surface, in an area defined as an 'open yard' on Store's plans, but may have been an enclosed cemetery. Alternatively, they may post-date the destruction of the priory.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence (or absence), extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains (particularly burials) in the area affected by the test pit.
- 2.1.2 To preserve, by record, any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks, particularly any burials or foundations relating to the priory.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The 1 m x 0.6 m test pit was located on the south side of the church, approximately 4.5 m south of the kitchen extension. The pit was hand excavated in spits by a contractor to a maximum depth of 1.2 m below the modern ground surface. An archaeologist was in attendance throughout.
- 2.2.2 Archaeological recording was undertaken. A plan showing the extent of the excavation and the location of any recorded sections was maintained by the at a scale of 1:50 (reproduced in Fig. 2 at 1:400). Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 (reproduced at 1:25 Fig. 2), as appropriate. A photographic record was made using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the

work was also made using a digital camera. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The underlying natural, chalk (4), was encountered at a depth of between 0.9 m at west end of the pit and 1 m at the east end of the pit (Fig. 2, section 1). This was overlain by a layer of light brown-grey silty sand (3), which had inclusions of irregular chalk boulders. This deposit was 0.2 m deep and was the interface between the graveyard soil and the natural. Above this was the graveyard soil (2), a loose brown-grey sandy silt with occasional chalk and flint inclusions, which was 0.5 m deep. It contained small quantities of post-medieval pottery, clay pipe, tile and animal bone (not retained). This layer was interpreted as generalised build up of the ground surface as a result of centuries of burial activity.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 All the finds recovered during the course of the watching brief were post medieval, dating to the 18th and 19th centuries. They included fragments of earthenware pottery, clay pipe stems, tile and butchered animal bones. The majority of these were recovered from layer 2, the worked graveyard soil, and represent domestic refuse. The presence of these finds was noted, although they were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief did not observe any features, structures or deposits relating to the earlier Priory. The post-medieval deposits (Layers 2 and 3) are associated with churchyard management and burial activity. No graves or human remains were found.

4.1.2 No earlier archaeology, either in the form of residual finds, deposits or truncated features, was observed during the course of the watching brief.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth/Height</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.16 m - 0.18 m	-	Topsoil/Turf		modern
2	Layer	0.5 m	-	Graveyard soil	Pottery, tile, clay pipe, animal bone	18th- 19th century
3	Layer	0.2 m	-	Interface graveyard soil and natural	-	-
4	Layer	-	-	Natural chalk	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Barker, P P, and Tomkinson, K 2001 *A report for Oxford Archaeological Unit on a geophysical survey carried out at St Thomas' Church, Goring on Thames, Berkshire*, Stratascan Geophysics for Archaeology and Engineering unpublished report, April 2001

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OA, 2007 *Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire - Written scheme of Investigation*, Oxford Archaeological Unit unpublished report, September 2007

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)*

Sherwood, J and Pevsner, N 1974 *The buildings of England- Oxfordshire*, Penguin Press

Smith, P 2007 *St Thomas's Church, Goring-on-Thames design brief for archaeological field evaluation*, Oxfordshire County Archaeology Services

Wessex Archaeology 1992 *Church of St Thomas of Canterbury at Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire- archaeological watching brief*, Wessex Archaeology unpublished report, July 1992

Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details

Site name: St Thomas of Canterbury, Goring, Oxfordshire

Site code: GOTOM08

Grid reference: SU 59765 80715

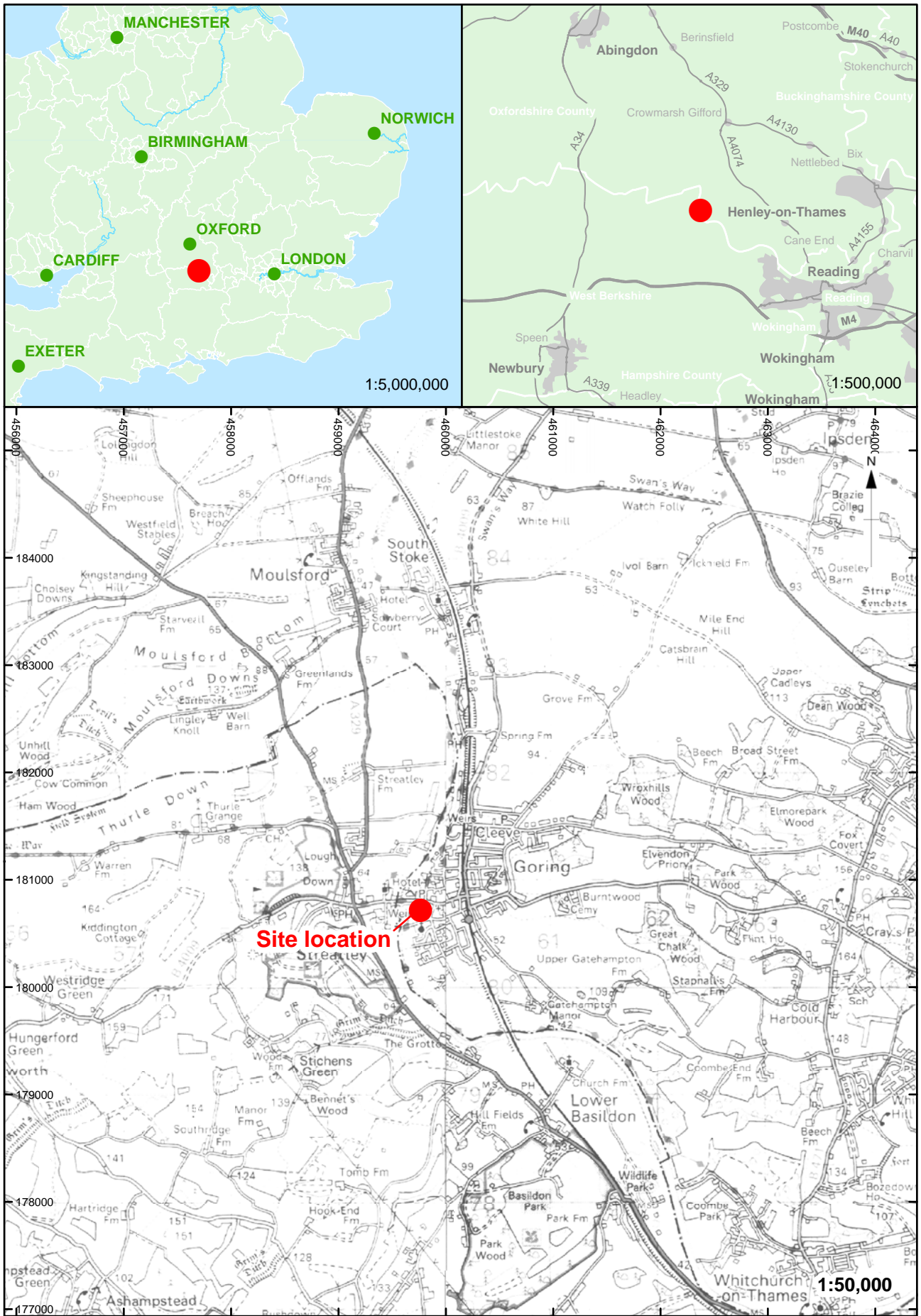
Type of watching brief: Test pit for soil evaluation

Date and duration of project: 14th May 2008

Area of site: 1.5 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief observed build up layers for graveyard, but no other significant archaeology was encountered.

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



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Figure 1: Site location

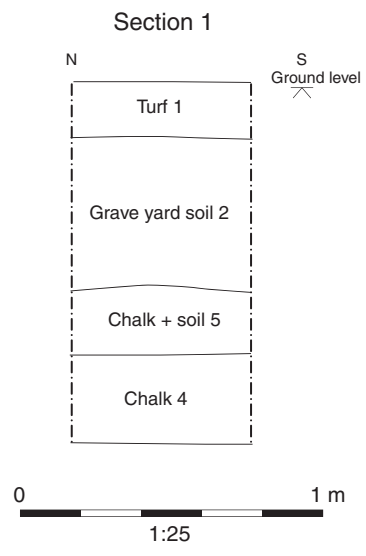
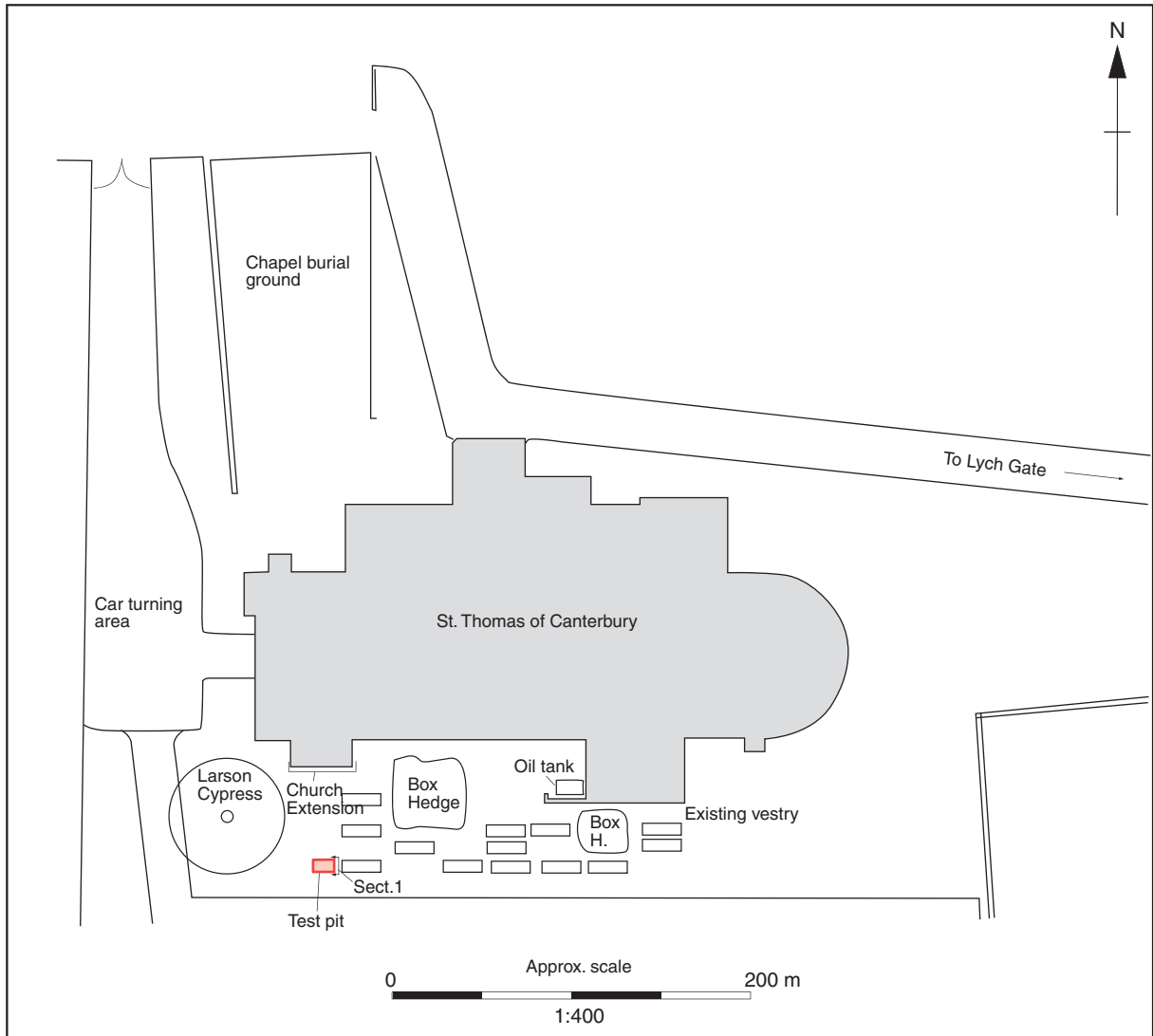


Figure 2 : Site plan with location of test pit and section 1



Plate 1: Test pit location



Plate 2: Section 1, facing east