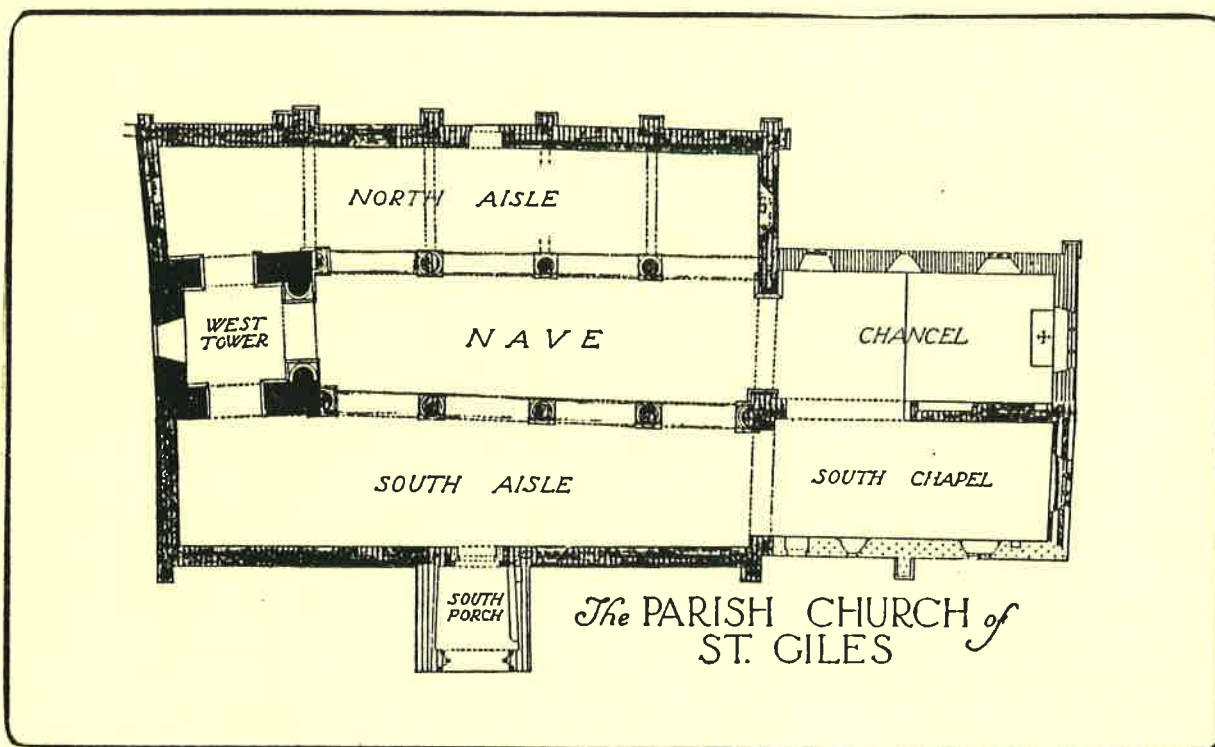


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St. Giles' Church, Oxford

NGR SP 5113 0698

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT



Oxford Archaeological Unit
March 2001

St Giles' Church, Oxford
NGR 5113 0698

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared by: J Hiller

Date: March 26th 2001

Checked by: *A. Hillier*

Date: *2.4.01*

Approved by: *R. Williams* ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Date: *30/3/2001*

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
March 2001**

**ST. GILES' CHURCH
OXFORD
NGR SP 5113 0698**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
REPORT**

Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at St. Giles' Church, Oxford, in January 2001. The watching brief took place during preliminary groundwork in the South Aisle forming part of the design for a new mezzanine floor. Following consultations with the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, and the discovery of several brick vaults, the plans were altered in order to suspend the new floor from the existing walls, rather than continue the below-ground work.

The work in the South Aisle revealed a total of four brick vaults, of which one contained a lead coffin and one contained a wooden coffin. A further brick vault had previously been broken open and the coffin removed and the fourth vault did not appear to contain a coffin. These vaults probably date to the late 18th -early 19th century. A further brick-built structure was identified, and this may have served as a water tank. The excavated soil from the trenches contained a quantity of loose human bones, which were replaced below the floor. A few coffin fittings dating to the latter half of the 18th century/start of the Victorian period, were recovered from general make-up layers. No structural features relating to the medieval church were observed in the course of the work.

ST. GILES' CHURCH, OXFORD

NGR SP 5113 0698

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at St. Giles' Church, Oxford (Fig. 1), during excavations prior to the installation of a new mezzanine floor, suspended upon floor posts. The groundwork was undertaken by contractors (Knowles and Son) under plans devised by Thomas Rayson Partnership, Architects of Oxford. After the initial excavation work, and following consultations with the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, the plans were revised and a proposal drawn up to suspend the floor from the existing walls. The excavation work in the church was monitored by OAU during visits to the site in January 2001. This report summarizes the archaeological aspects of the work. Each feature or layer was assigned a unique context number (starting at 100), and this information is presented in table form at the end of the report.

2 Historical Background

St. Giles' Church dates to the Norman period, and was the work of one Edwin Godgoose; little of the original fabric of the building survives. The church is first mentioned in 1138. Many additions were made to the building in the 13th century, and the south chapel was rebuilt in the mid-19th century, and the present appearance of the church is due to restoration work carried out by Sir Charles Nicholson in the early 1920s (Pevsner and Sherwood 1974, 292-293). OAU previously undertook watching brief work at this church in 1994 (OAU, 1994), during the renewal of the floor in the south chapel and in 1996, during drainage work in the churchyard north of the Chancel (OAU, 1996)

3 Results (Fig. 2)

The excavation work took place at the west end of the South Aisle in the area partly covered by existing marked grave stones (Burgess et al, Fig. 2) . A general layer of make-up material for the present church wooden floor was observed during all intrusive work. The layer (100=200=300=400) comprised loose grey-brown sandy gravel containing fragments of previously disturbed human bone and occasional pieces of coffin furniture. The layer was generally 0.65 m thick and overlay a number of brick vault structures that were partly exposed in the course of the works. In total four were observed, together with a brick structure interpreted as a water tank of recent build.

At the west end of the South Aisle adjacent to the tower was a stone capped brick vault (101) measuring 0.7 m by 0.75 m as exposed. The bricks measured 120 mm x 240 x 80 mm and were bonded with a grey-white cement, constructed in layers of staggered stretchers. The capping stones were roughly cut slabs and un-

mortared. The vault contained at least one lead or lead-lined coffin that was not further investigated.

East of 101 lay a stone capped brick vault (201), with the same brick type and bond. The vault measured 0.7 m by 0.3 m, but was only partly uncovered. Two wooden coffins were seen within the vault; the upper coffin had collapsed although the lower one was well preserved.

In the south-west corner of the South Aisle was a brick structure (301) measuring 0.65 m x 0.88 m and 0.6 m deep. The bricks were coated in lead paint. The structure may have served as a water tank - some rendered stone at the north-east side of the structure hinted at the presence of a further stone-capped brick vault.

Along the south wall of the South Aisle were two further vaults: a partly demolished brick vault (401) had previously been opened. The construction type and build was the same as structures 101 and 201- the structure survived in parts for a length of 1.9 m. The brickwork was infilled with the general floor make-up material (400). A second vault (402) was brick-built with part of the stone capping *in situ*. The construction method and brick types were the same as for 101, 201 etc., but there was no evidence for a coffin.

4 The Finds

A quantity of human bone was recovered in the course of the works; this material was not retained for further analysis and the bones were re-interred within the church.

A total of 4 coffin handles were recovered from the general make-up layers (100 = 400). These had previously been disturbed and were not directly associated with any coffins. No other finds were recovered in the course of the watching brief. The coffin handles have been analysed by Osteo-archaeologist Angela Boyle of OAU:

Context 100: a single iron grip and grip plate. Type not recognized, badly corroded.

Context 400: 3 iron grips, quite badly corroded. classified as Type 2a at Christ Church, Spitalfields dated between 1763 and 1837 (Reeve and Adams, 1993).

5 Conclusions

The results from this watching brief were limited in nature. The presence of brick-built vaults beneath the floor was not surprising, as burial within churches was a common practice until the mid-late 19th century.

No intact human remains were disturbed or removed from the church during the work. Some recent disturbance to one of the vaults was noted, and this may have occurred during the 1920s reordering of the church.

The brick vaults appear to be typical of the late 18th-19th century. An earlier date cannot be entirely ruled out without further investigations within the church. The coffin fittings from the make-up layers date to the latter half of the 18th/19th centuries. The fact that they were within the general layer beneath the present floor suggests that coffins had previously been disturbed within the church, perhaps at the time the brick vaults were constructed here.

No further information regarding the medieval origins of this church was recovered during this watching brief.

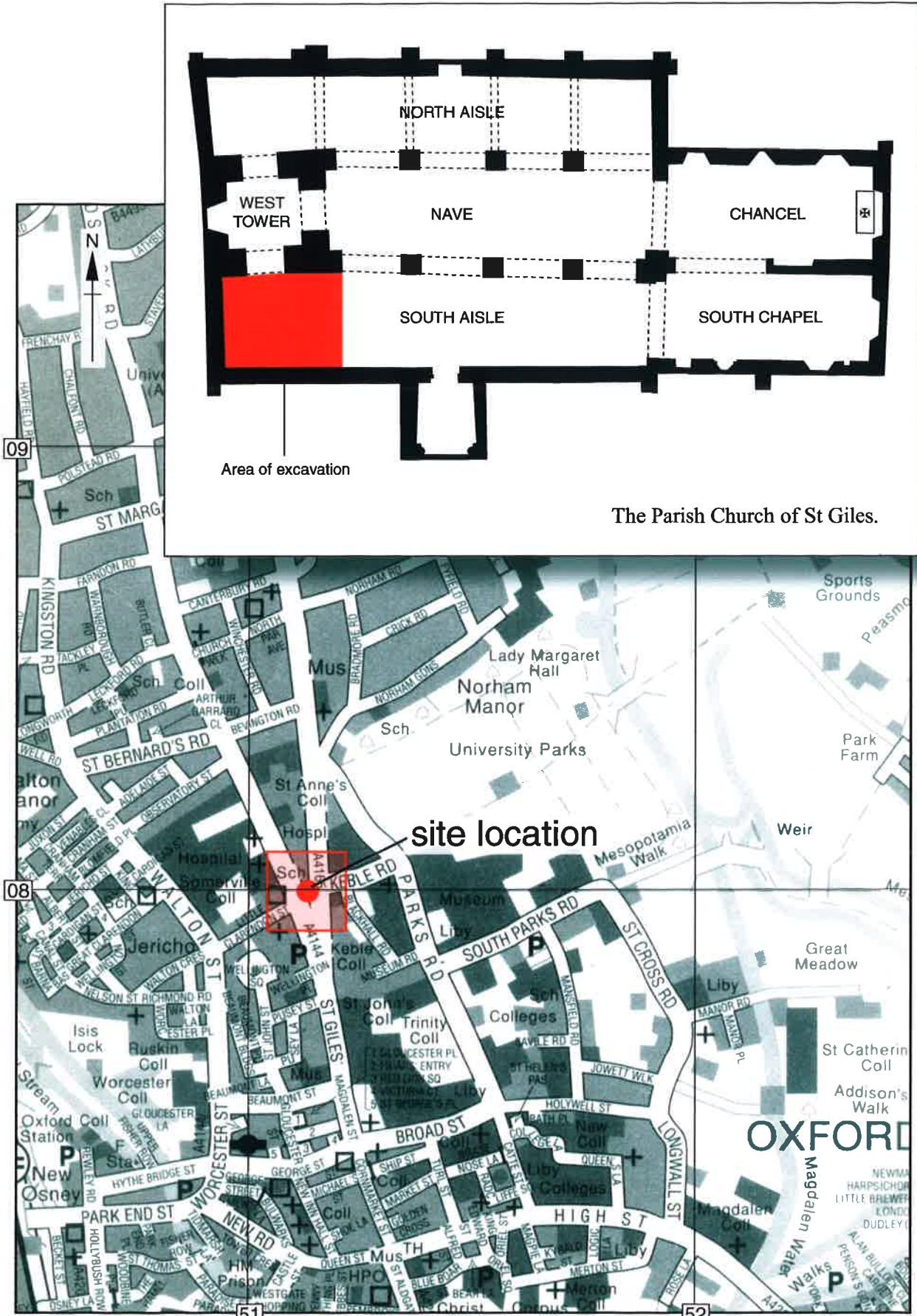
J Hiller
March 2001

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Table of context information

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Comments/date
100	Layer	0.65 m+	-	Make-up for floor, mixed sandy gravel including charnel bone and coffin pieces - C19 and C20 mixed layer
101	Structure	-	0.75 m	Stone capped brick vault containing lead coffin, C19
200	Layer	0.65 m+	-	Same layer as 100
201	Structure	-	0.7 m	Stone capped brick vault containing 2x wooden coffins, C19
300	Layer	0.65 m+	-	Same deposit as 100, 200
301	Structure	0.6 m	0.65m	Water tank structure, sealed with lead paint and render. Adjacent stone rendered may be part of a stone capped vault, C19/C20
400	Layer	0.65 m+	-	Layer, same as 100, 200, 300
401	Structure	-	-	Broken out brick vault, removed during excavation, C19
402	Structure	-	1.6 m	Brick vault with stone capping, C19



The Parish Church of St Giles.

Scale 1:12,500

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Figure 1: Site location.



Figure 2 : Plan of watching brief observations.



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: postmaster@oau-oxford.com www.oau-oxford.com



Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES