

# All Saints Church High Wycombe



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



March 2011

**Client: All Saints Church PCC**

Issue No: 1  
OA Job No: 4587  
NGR: SU 865 930





Client Name: All Saints Church PCC  
Client Ref No:  
Document Title: All Saints Church, High Wycombe  
Document Type: Watching Brief Report  
Issue/Version Number: 1  
Grid Reference: NGR SU 865 930  
Planning Reference:  
OA Job Number: 4587  
Site Code: HIYASN10  
Invoice Code: HIYASNWB  
Receiving Museum: Buckinghamshire County Museum  
Museum Accession No:  
Event No:

Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
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Document File Location X:\HIYASN10 All Saints, High Wycombe  
Graphics File Location  
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## **All Saints Church, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire**

*Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Mark Woodley*

*Illustrated by Magda Wachnik*

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### **Summary**

*During September and October 2010 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at All Saints Church, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 86571 93089). The work was commissioned by JBKS Architects on behalf of All Saints Church PCC in advance of the installation of new toilets and kitchens. The watching brief revealed three internal brick-lined vaults of post-medieval date. The vaults contained triple-shelled wood and lead coffins. Small assemblages of disarticulated human remains, medieval tile, metalwork, animal bone and shell were recovered. The bulk of the material was redeposited, probably during restoration work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The exception to this were three damaged and poorly preserved medieval floor tiles.*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 During September and October 2010, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at All Saints Church, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by JBKS Architects on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of All Saints Church in advance of the installation of new toilets and kitchens which necessitated the excavation of four pipe trenches and two new manholes at the western end of the church.
- 1.1.2 All archaeological work followed a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2010) which was produced in response to an archaeological recording specification set by Julian Munby, the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 All Saints church is located in the centre of the town of High Wycombe between Castle Street and High Street (NGR SU 86571 93089) (Fig. 1). The geology of the area is chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The original church was consecrated by the visiting Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester in 1086 and was extended during the reign of Henry II, when the church was bestowed on the Abbey of Godstow. The church was rebuilt in 1275
- 1.3.2 In the mid-fifteenth century the roof was removed, the pillars remodelled and the clerestory windows added.
- 1.3.3 The central tower was taken down in 1509 because of structural problems. The present tower was completed in 1522, while the pinnacles were added in 1755.
- 1.3.4 The wrought iron churchyard gates are Grade II listed and were authorised by the vestry in 1772.
- 1.3.5 The church contains the Shelburne memorial, carved by the Flemish sculptor, Peter Scheemaker in 1754. It also contains the vault of William Petty, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Shelburne, who was prime minister of England from July 1782 to April 1783. In 1761, having briefly served as MP for Wycombe, he succeeded his father as Earl of Shelburne. Following his resignation as Prime Minister he was created Marquis of Lansdowne and Earl Wycombe. He was buried in the family vault in the North Chancel Chapel on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1805.
- 1.3.6 The church was restored between 1873-5 by George Edmund Street.
- 1.3.7 Previous work by OA in January 1993, investigated three 18<sup>th</sup>-century burial vaults beneath the chancel floor (OAU 1993). The vaults cover virtually all the available space under the chancel floor and contain the remains of the Welles, Smith and Rotton families.
- 1.3.8 Further work in 1998 by Oxford Archaeology comprised the recording of the exterior of a post-medieval brick vault located in the churchyard (OAU 1998). It was not possible to gain entry to the vault due to health and safety restrictions, therefore recording was carried out from the exterior. The vault contained two triple-shelled wood and lead coffins with textile covering of probable mid-19<sup>th</sup> century date.





## 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The principal aims of the work were to:

- (i) To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the area affected by the development.
- (ii) To provide a record of any structures exposed below the floor, with particular emphasis on determining the presence of any burial vaults.
- (iii) To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during the excavation by hand of the trenches and manholes.

2.2.2 A written, drawn and photographic record of the exposed features and deposits was made.



### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Archaeological deposits

##### *Trench 1*

- 3.1.1 Trench 1 was located at the western end of the north aisle. It was aligned NW-SE and extended from the north-western corner of the church to the southern side of the north aisle where a manhole for a new toilet area was to be located. The trench was filled by a rubble floor make-up layer (1000) below the present ground surface. This layer was present in all four trenches.
- 3.1.2 A west-east aligned extension to Trench 1 measured 2.1 m in length, 0.30 m in width and up to 0.35 m in depth. It was also filled by a 19th-century make-up layer (1000) below the existing floor.
- 3.1.3 Excavation of the manhole for the new toilet area within the western end of the north aisle breached the southern wall of a brick-built, 19th-century burial vault (context 1001) with a barrel-vaulted ceiling. The top of this vault lay 0.28 m below the present floor surface. The vault was orientated west-east. Examination of the breach revealed a chamber, which was almost completely filled with rubble. This vault extended approximately 1.50 m to the west of the breach and at least 2.00 m to the east of the breach. The western end was blocked by a brick wall. The eastern end was not visible due to the fill of rubble. The eastern half of the top of the vault had been removed to a depth of 0.32 m from the floor level during the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century remodelling of the church.

##### *Trench 2*

- 3.1.4 Trench 2 was located at the southern edge of the north aisle and was aligned W-E. It extended from the location of the new manhole to the western wall of the north aisle.

##### *Trench 3*

- 3.1.5 Trench 3 ran across the nave in a north-south direction from the new toilet manhole to the new kitchen manhole located at the northern side of the south aisle. This trench was moved eastwards as the original route would have gone through vault 1002 (Fig. 2). A small quantity of redeposited coffin wood was present at the southern end of trench 3.
- 3.1.6 A vault (context 1002) was revealed in trench three, below the central aisle immediately to the east of the baptismal font. The vault measured approximately 2.70 m in length, 1.40 m in width and 2 m in depth. It was constructed from a skin of red bricks with a barrel-vaulted top. This had previously been breached, presumably during Victorian restoration work. Steps led up from the vault directly beneath the font. Investigation of the breach showed this to be a burial chamber with at least six, and possibly up to nine, triple-shelled, fabric-covered 19<sup>th</sup>- century coffins (Plate 3). At least five of the coffins were adult sized and one was probably that of a child.
- 3.1.7 Two plaques on the western wall of the north aisle are probably related to this vault. The inscriptions read as follows:

Charles Harris Esq  
12<sup>th</sup> Jan 1801 age 68  
Anne his Widow, Daughter of Joshua Morris



20<sup>th</sup> Aug 1816 Age 78

Sacred to the Memory of  
Mr Joshua Morris  
Late of this Borough  
Also of  
Four of His Grand Children  
By Anne his Daughter  
Wife of Charles Harris Esq  
of Chelsea  
*viz*  
Charlotte. Eliza. Frederick  
and Charles their Eldest son  
Who Departed this life  
The 16<sup>th</sup> Janry 1781  
Aged 11 Years

#### **Trench 4**

- 3.1.8 Trench 4 was aligned W-E along the northern side of the south aisle, running from the new kitchen manhole to the western wall of the south aisle. The trench continued on the same alignment in the graveyard to connect with an existing manhole.
- 3.1.9 Four medieval floor tiles were observed at the western extremity of the internal part of trench four next to the western wall (Figure 2, Plates 1 and 2). These were photographed and retained.
- 3.1.10 Partial excavation of the second manhole, within the proposed kitchen area in the south aisle, breached the western end of the southern wall of a second brick built burial chamber (context 1003). This manhole was therefore relocated. The vault appeared to be a brick-built single shaft without a barrel-vaulted ceiling. A triple-shelled wood and lead, fabric-covered 19th-century coffin was visible. This was in poor condition and the lead was already breached. The interior of the vault was white washed. Marble plaques on the nearby southern wall suggest that this vault may contain members of the Peck family. The plaques were inscribed as follows:

Near this Place  
lies the Body of  
Mr Robert Peck  
*an eminent attorney at law*  
who died October the 1<sup>st</sup> 1756 Aged 72  
Also the Body of  
Mrs Elizabeth Peck  
Wife of the aforesaid  
Mr Robert Peck  
who died September the 14<sup>th</sup> 1749 Aged 59  
And Also the Body of  
Robert Peck  
Son of theirs who died  
November the 22<sup>nd</sup> 1721 Aged 8 Months  
Also the Bodies of  
Susannah Price Dr of theirs



Obt 6<sup>th</sup> December 1780 AE t . 57  
And the Revd James Price  
24yrs Vicar of this Parish  
Obt 6<sup>th</sup> Jany 1788 AE t . 63

In Memory of  
Susannah, Wife of  
The Revd Tho Jones of Dinton  
in [-----] Daughter of  
The Revd James Price  
Late Vicar of this Parish  
Obt 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1802  
AE t 40[?]  
Also of Susan Philipa  
only Child of  
The Revd Thomas Jones  
and the above Susannah his  
Late Wife  
Ob [?]th Oct 1806 AE t 18[?]

- 3.1.11 The external portion of Trench 4 was dug to a depth of 1.3 m. It was filled by a 19th-century subsoil layer (1011) overlaid by modern topsoil (1010). During excavation of the external portion of Trench 4 in the graveyard a quantity of charnel was recovered from the subsoil.

### 3.2 Finds summary

#### ***Disarticulated human remains***

- 3.2.1 A small quantity of material was recovered from three contexts (1000, 1004, 1011). The material was generally well preserved. Two bones exhibited evidence of non-specific infection.

#### ***Medieval floor tile and ceramic building material***

- 3.2.2 A total of 26 medieval floor tiles (contexts 1000 and 1005) and a single fragment of medieval floor tile were recovered (1011).

#### ***Metalwork***

- 3.2.3 The assemblage comprises 10 iron nails (contexts 1000, 1011), 1 copper alloy object (context 1004) and a piece of lead (context 1004). None of the material is closely dateable, however, it is possible that the nails derive from coffins. All the material is redeposited.

#### ***Animal bone***

- 3.2.4 A small quantity of animal bone was recovered from contexts 1000, 1004 and 1011.

#### ***Shell***

- 3.2.5 Two oyster shells (upper and lower) were recovered from contexts 1000 and 1011.



### **3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains**

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



## 4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The relatively shallow depth of the groundworks meant that no early sections of the medieval church were observed. A rubble levelling deposit (1001), measuring at least 0.70 m in thickness, was observed throughout the excavations which either obscured medieval floors and walls or filled voids following the removal of medieval structures.
- 4.1.2 A total of three brick-built vaults were revealed within the church. Two of the vaults had barrel-vaulted ceilings and varied in size. There was a single, brick-built, shaft grave, possibly capable of containing several individuals. A stairway led to the base of vault 2 from beneath the present font, and it is feasible that the chamber was used for several generations. As ground reduction varied within the church it is possible that vaults may survive elsewhere. Vault 1 was almost completely filled with rubble deposits and no indication of burials or the family to whom it belonged was observed.
- 4.1.3 It is clear that the vaults pre-dated the deposition of the levelling deposit, with vault 1002, the resting place of the Harris family, being constructed in c.1800 and vault three, the likely resting place of the Peck family, being constructed c.1700. The date of vault 1001 is uncertain but it is likely to be broadly contemporary with vaults 1002 and 1003. The levelling layer (context 1000) is likely to be contemporary with Street's work in the mid 1870s.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

*Table 1: Archaeological context inventory*

Context	Type	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Comments	Date
1000	Layer	0.8	-	-	Rubble floor make-up below present ground surface, Trs 1-4	C19th
1001	Structure	>0.25	c.1.25	c.3.50	Brick-built vault, Trs 1/2	C19th
1002	Structure	>1.95	1.4	2.7	Brick-built vault, Tr. 3	C19th
1003	Structure	>0.60	c.0.90	c.1.90	Brick-built shaft burial, Tr. 4	C18th/19th
1004	Layer		-	-	Disturbed layer in graveyard	C 19th
1005	Layer		-	-	Disturbed layer in graveyard	C19th
1010	Layer	0.3	-	-	Topsoil in graveyard (Tr. 4 external)	Modern
1011	Layer	1	-	-	Subsoil in graveyard (Tr. 4 external)	C 19th



## APPENDIX B. FINDS

### Disarticulated human remains

**By Sharon Clough**

A small quantity of disarticulated human bone was recovered from three contexts (1000, 1004, 1011). The material was generally well preserved.

The bones in context 1000 appear to represent adult, child and infant. The adult bones are mostly from the centre area of the skeleton probably at least one male and one female.

The bone in context 1004 is a single foot bone which is adult sized.

The bones in context 1011 appear to represent the disturbed lower legs and feet of a single individual along with distal humerus fragments. Both tibiae exhibited active and healed periostitis, suggesting a long-term infection of the outer layer of the bone. The tibia is a common site for periostitis, as the skin is thin and the lower legs are more prone to accident and problems with venous drainage.

No further work is recommended.

*Table 2: Summary of disarticulated remains*

Context No.	Context type	Identified human remains
1000	19th-century levelling layer within church	Left pelvis female Right acetabulum and sciatic notch male 1 x rib fragment midshaft 1x rib fragment right side 5th metacarpal right 1x rib left 2x midshaft rib 1x cranial vault fragment sacral fragment cervical vertebrae approx. 3,4 or 5 1x child size rib fragment 1x infant size rib fragment 1x fibula fragment midshaft
1004	Disturbed layer in graveyard	Third left metatarsal
1011	19th-century subsoil, Trench 4, graveyard	Metatarsal 1-4 right Metatarsal 1-3 left Phalanges foot x 4 proximal Cuboid Cuneiform 2 and 3 right Lower 1/3 tibia and fibula right 1x rib shaft lower 1/3 humerus (without epiphyses) upper half radius shaft left metatarsal 5 and 4 right metatarsal 5 metatarsal 1 3 phalanges proximal distal tibia epiphysis 3x fibula fragments tibia shaft fragments calcaneus right cuneiform 1 navicular cuboid distal humerus 1/3 talus right





		1/2 calcaneus tibia proximal 1/2 right - periostitis striated and lamellar tibia proximal shaft 2/3 - periostitis striated and lamellar lumbar vertebra osteophytosis on distal body
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## Medieval floor tiles and other ceramic building material

by *John Cotter*

### *Introduction and methodology*

An assemblage comprising 27 pieces of ceramic building material (CBM) weighing 6.041 kg was recovered from three contexts. These are all medieval floor tiles (contexts 1000 and 1005). The only exception being a single piece of medieval roofing tile (44 g) from context (1011). The tiles were catalogued on an Excel spreadsheet at an 'intermediate' level of detail - somewhere between a basic catalogue (ie. recording just sherd counts and weight per context) and a detailed catalogue. A record of each bag of tiles was recorded. This includes basic details such as context number, number of sherds present and weight. Other details were recorded in a reasonably extensive comments field. These include, for most individual tiles, details such as measurable dimensions, fabric description, decoration and condition etc. An approximate spot-date was also assigned. As these floor tiles are of some interest – despite their poor condition – an attempt has been made to find parallels in the published literature on medieval floor tiles in the region. These details are also recorded in the spreadsheet and may be consulted here. A brief summary of the results is presented below

### Summary

In general the floor tiles are in poor condition. Most examples are fragmentary but at least seven are complete, or nearly so. Except for a couple of fresh tile fragments – possibly broken in antiquity - all the tiles are worn from use – in some cases the wear is extreme and all traces of the original upper surface have been worn off. Most tiles, including the decorated ones, are also covered to a varying extent in a white lime mortar. A few tiles are completely covered in thick mortar and none of their original surfaces are visible. The mortar covering from two or three tiles was scraped off during this assessment to better reveal their designs. The mortar covering suggests that the decorated tile floor became worn and defunct in antiquity and was covered over. Some mortared tile fragments were probably treated as rubble or hardcore. Some of the bags had labels inside recording details of find spot (at least one tile was found 'in situ'). These details are also in the comments fields.

It is very likely that all the decorated floor tiles (of which there are several) are from the Penn tileries in Buckinghamshire or, in a few cases, perhaps from unknown but similar tileries in Buckinghamshire. The Penn kilns were in production during the period c 1330-1380 and supplied tiles to a very wide area of southern and south-east England. These have a pale orange-brown sandy fabric. They are typically c 110 mm. square and c 20-23 mm thick with slightly bevelled edges. Decorative designs were 'printed' onto the upper surface by coating a wooden stamp in white slip (liquid clay) and stamping onto the tiles – the slip designs during this period were very shallow and wear off relatively easily as a result. The upper surface was then covered in a clear lead glaze and the tiles then fired. At this period the designs are very stylized and sometimes unclear. Floral and geometric designs were most popular, also heraldic symbols and more complex schemes of four, eight and sixteen adjoining tiles with symmetrical decoration (crosses, circles, compass-like motifs etc) repeated on adjoining tiles.

All the designs present here can be paralleled in Hohler's corpus of medieval floor tiles from



Bucks (Hohler 1942) and many are also paralleled in Haberly's study of tiles from Oxfordshire and adjoining counties (Haberly 1937). Common designs such as the cinquefoil or large daisy occur here, also fleur de lys and a variety of geometric and debased heraldic designs. One tile shows opposing stags and possibly birds. Some of these designs occur at the Penn kiln site. Although these tiles are almost certainly datable to the period of Penn production c 1330-1380 some of these designs – known as Little Brickhill-style tiles - occur in a church floor at Great Linford, Buckinghamshire dated to the late 15th century (Mynard 1992). Some of the Penn designs may have been copied by other tileries and remained in production as late as this. Some of the tiles from All Saints Church are glazed but plain and, interestingly, one is warped and clearly a waster or a 'second' as it is markedly curved and was probably only useful as hardcore. This could suggest the presence of other tile kilns closer to High Wycombe.

The tiles should be kept in case of future research into this interesting class of medieval artefacts. For the present no further work is recommended.

## **Metalwork**

### ***By Ian Scott***

The metal assemblage comprises 10 pieces of iron, 1 copper alloy object and a piece of lead.

#### Context 1000

1 cut iron nail with small head and rectangular section stem. Complete but encrusted. L: 78 mm

1 iron nail with tapering square section stem and small domed head. Complete but encrusted. L: c 64 mm.

#### Context 1011

8 nail fragments, encrusted, probably at least 2 complete nails. Not measured.

#### Context 1004

1 x hollow domed head of a furniture tack. Copper alloy. D: 14 mm.

1 x piece of melted lead waste. Not measured.

None of the metal finds are closely datable. However, it is possible that the nails derive from coffins. All the material is redeposited.

## **Animal Bone**

### ***By Rebecca Nicholson***

A very small assemblage of animal bone was recovered. All was in fair-good condition, although some gnawing was observed on bone in context 1011 and several bones exhibited fresh breaks.



Context 1000.

This context included well preserved remains from the lower legs from a minimum of two sheep or goats.

A complete sheep/goat left metacarpal. Measurements (after von den Driesch 1976) are : TL = 122.9mm, Bp=22.36mm, Bd = 24.56mm, SD = 1.33mm

A sheep/goat right distal metacarpal, fused. Bd=24.7

A left sheep/goat proximal metatarsal, fused, Bp=19.5

Context 1004.

A single juvenile canid (puppy or fox cub) left femur. The bone was in good condition although broken into two pieces and all epiphyses were present and unfused..

Context 1011

This context included well preserved, but highly fragmented bones comprising:

A large mammal (cattle/horse) proximal humerus shaft fragment, chopped and heavily gnawed at the edges.

A large mammal (cattle/horse) rib fragment with evidence of a healed fracture.

A large mammal (cattle/horse) scapula glenoid fragment.

A large bird (goose-sized) left proximal and mid-shaft fragment.

A medium/large mammal right proximal tibia fragment, unfused, probably pig

A large mammal tibia shaft fragment

Three small large mammal limb bone shaft fragments.

No further work is recommended.

## **The shell**

### ***By Geraldine Crann***

Two oyster shells (upper and lower) were recovered from contexts 1000 and 1011. No further work is required.



## APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** All Saints Church, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

**Site code:** HIYASN10

**Grid reference:** NGR SU 860 930

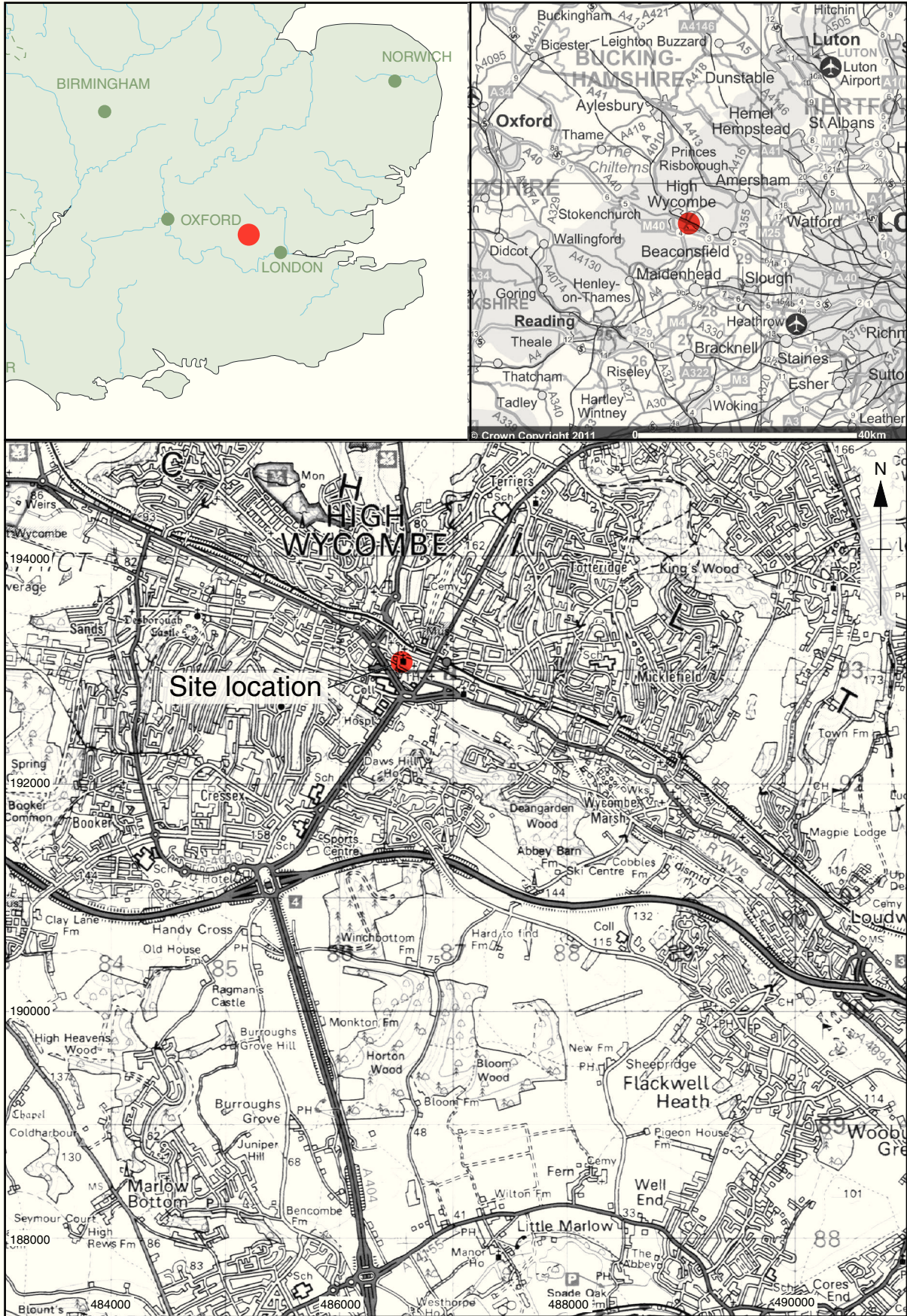
**Type:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration:** 09/09/2010 to 12/10/2010 - a total of eight site visits were made during the course of the ground works.

**Area of site:**

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed three brick-lined burial vaults and a small part of a medieval floor.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: [insert]



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Figure 1: Site location

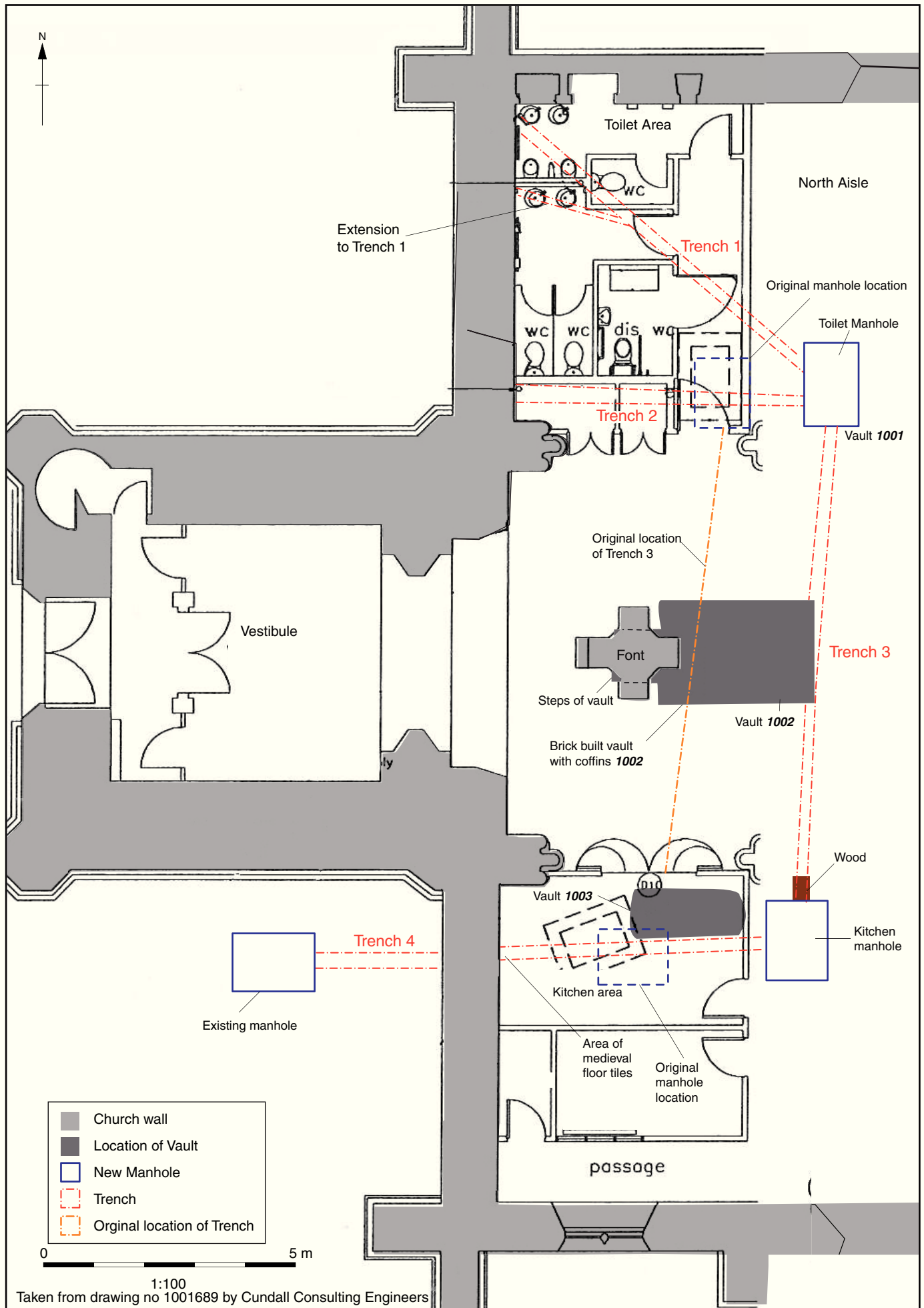


Figure 2: Plan of church interior showing trench locations

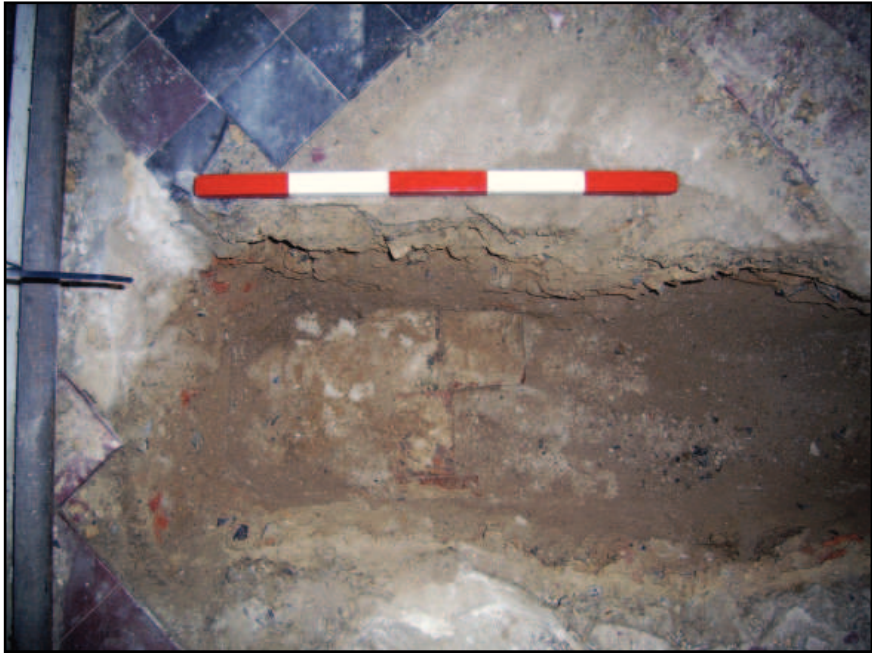


Plate 1: In situ medieval floor tiles in Trench 4

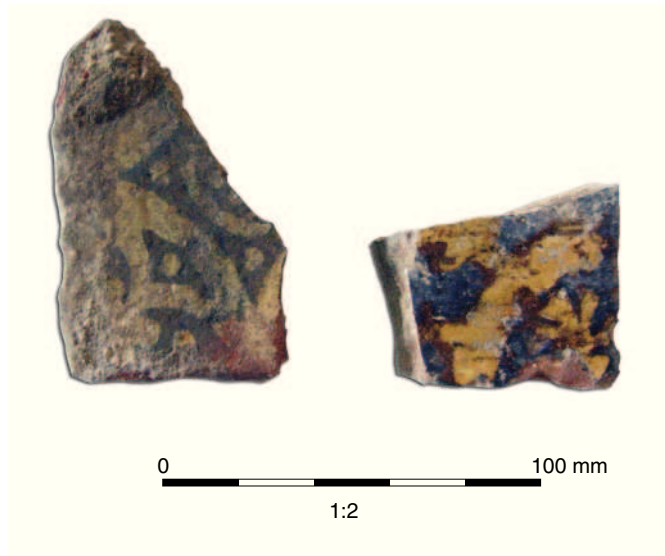


Plate 2: Detail of medieval floor tiles



Plate 3: Coffins in vault 1002







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