

WARDINGTON (OX)

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745/2001

Acanthus Clews Architects

**ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH, WARDINGTON,
OXFORDSHIRE**

NGR SP 464 492

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 2001

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In May 2001 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Mary Magdalene Church, Wardington, Oxfordshire (SP464492). The watching brief monitored the excavation of a service trench from the north porch to the entrance to the churchyard. Two in-situ inhumations were recorded during the watching brief; neither were dated.

1. Introduction

The village of Wardington lies on the A361 from Banbury to Daventry (Fig.1). The church is located in Lower Wardington (SP464492). The churchyard to the north of St Mary Magdalene slopes from 143.41 OD adjacent to the northern entrance to the church, to 141.33 OD by the northern boundary wall.

2 Background

The name Wardington first appears in *c* 1180, but the name is probably of Anglo-Saxon origin. The village consists of Upper and Lower Wardington which appear to have developed around the manor house and church respectively (Morgan, 1982).

The church of St Mary Magdalene dates from the 12th century and still retains a number of 12th-century features including parts of the chancel. The nave was rebuilt in the 13th century and alterations made to the north and south aisles. Further additions and renovations were also made in the 14th, 15th and 19th centuries (Pevsner, 1974).

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilised standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results

The watching brief monitored the excavation of a new service trench from the north door of the church to the northern entrance to the churchyard (Fig. 2). The trench was 0.30 m in width and was excavated to a depth of 0.90 m below ground level (bgl) to accommodate a new foul water sewer and a fresh water main.

The trench was excavated through a mid orange brown clayey silt with 20-25% limestone fragments (2). Whilst the composition of this deposit remained fairly constant along the length of the trench, the compaction appeared to vary - with localised patches of looser soil - perhaps suggesting the presence of backfilled graves. The small amount of charnal recovered also seemed to be concentrated in the areas of loose soil, perhaps reinforcing this hypothesis.

Two inhumations were observed within the confines of the trench (Fig. 3; Contexts 3 and 4):

Approximately 11.60 m to the north of the church, the skull of an inhumation was recorded at a depth of *c* 0.86 m bgl. This was almost certainly *in-situ* as six iron coffin nails were recovered and the mandible was partially intact. The location of the skull was planned (Fig. 3, Plan 2) and the skull removed to be reburied when the trench was backfilled. No obvious grave cut was apparent and no dating evidence recovered.

A second inhumation was partially exposed approximately 25.70 m to the north of the church. The femur and tibia of both legs were revealed and planned (Fig. 3, Plan 3). As this inhumation was exposed in the base of the trench (0.90 m bgl) the bones were left *in-situ* as no further impact would be made.

A deposit of mid orange brown yellow sand (1) was observed in section approximately 5.7 m from the northern end of the trench. This deposit was overlain by deposit 2 and is almost certainly natural (Fig. 3, Section 1).

6 Finds

No finds were retained during the watching brief. The excavated skeletons and the associated charnal were re-buried prior to the installation of the new path.

7 Environmental results

Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits and the very tight constraints of the excavation, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

Although the impact of the service trench was limited, a number of suggestions as to the nature of the deposits and features recorded can be made from the observations made during the watching brief.

The origin of the deposit through which the service trench was excavated is uncertain. The 'loose' patches within the deposit may represent grave cuts although the small quantity of charnal recovered suggests that the number of burials along the western side of the existing path is small. This may suggest that the path has been in use for a considerable time.

The two burials which were observed presumably pre-date the path and may pre-date the construction of the north aisle (and consequently the northern entrance to the

church) in the 13th century. It should be stressed that this argument is purely conjectural as no dating evidence was recovered, and the date of the path's origin is uncertain.

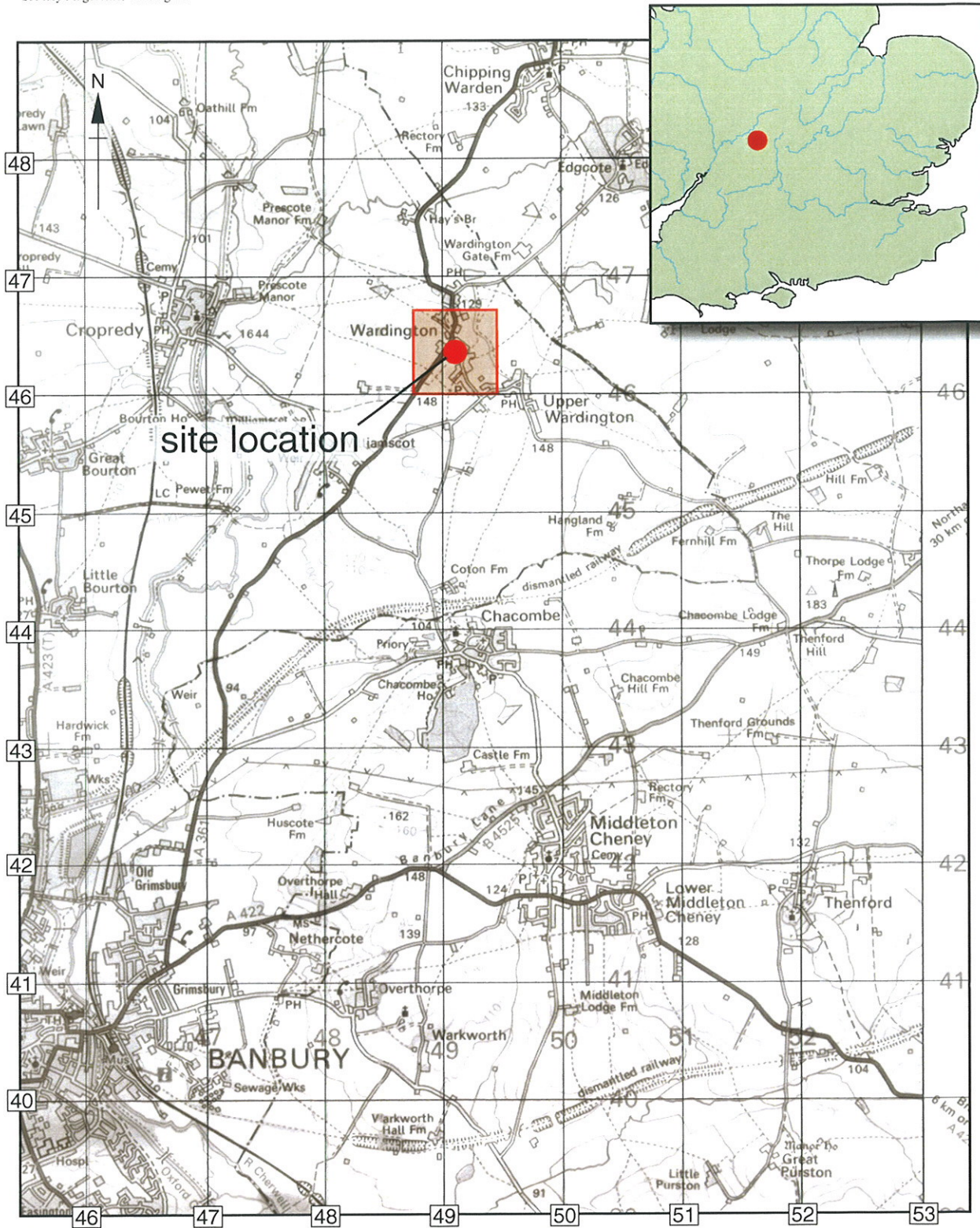
Also of note is the fact that the head and foot stones to the west of the path are all aligned north-south. These have almost certainly been moved, possibly during the construction of the buildings marking the western limit of the graveyard. The most recent of these headstones is dated 1887 (William Law of Northampton), although the date of the construction of the adjacent buildings is uncertain. Alternatively, the relocation of the head and foot stones may relate to the refurbishment of the church in 1887.

References.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).

Pevsner, N The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire, (1974).

Morgan, Francis, R Wardington Past and Present, (Wardington Parochial Church Council, 1982).



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

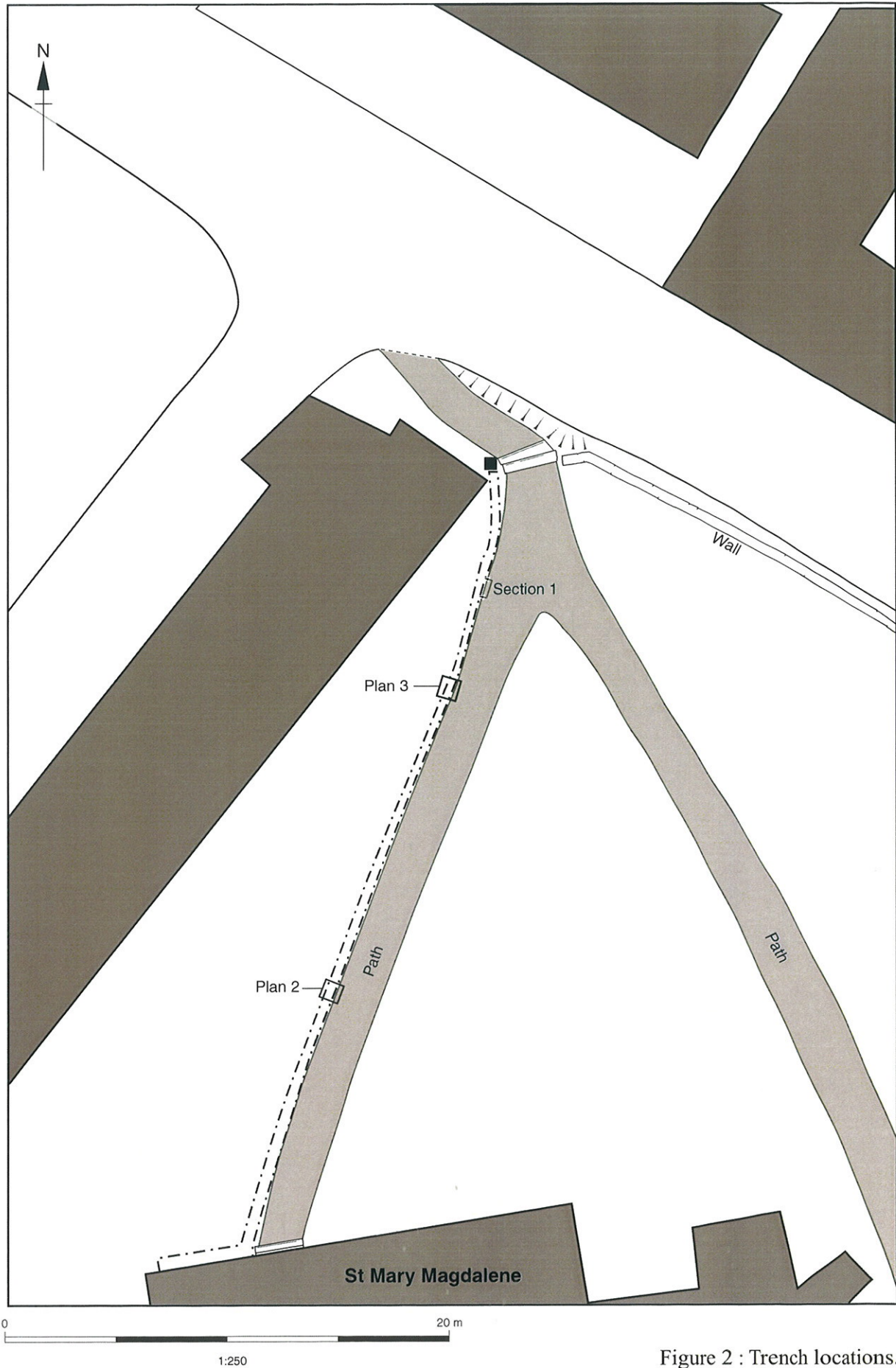


Figure 2 : Trench locations.

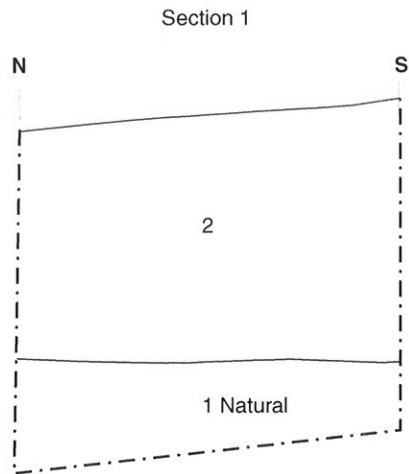
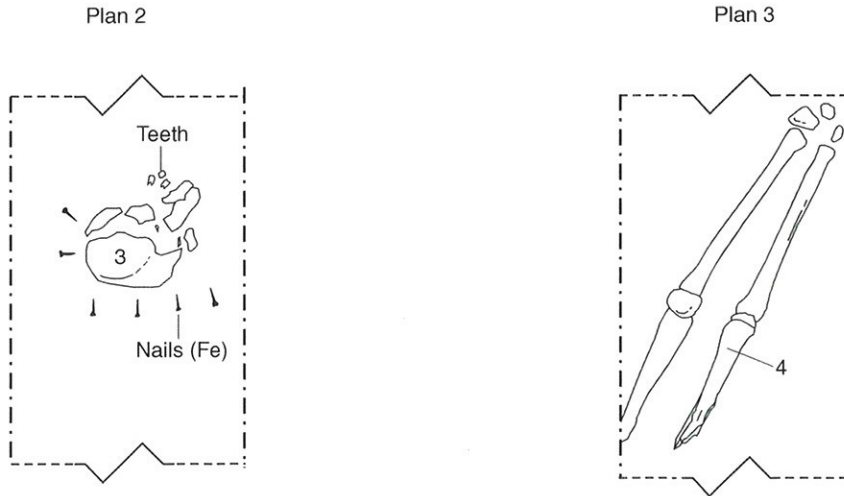


Figure 3 : Plans 2, 3 and section 1.



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