

Dr A Amato Ltd.

The Church of St John the Evangelist, Wallingford

NGR SU 6076 8940

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. P97/W0085

Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 1999

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Prepared by: *[Signature]*

Date: *22/7/99*

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Date: *23/7/99*

Approved by: *R. Williams* HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date: *23/7/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit
July 1999

Summary

In February 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at The Church of St John the Evangelist, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 6076 8940). Two stone and brick-built graves were located at the base of shafts below grave slabs during enabling works: as a consequence the foundations were redesigned and the grave shafts backfilled after structural recording.

1 Introduction

The development proposal (planning application no. P97/W0085) comprised the construction of a new extension to the existing meeting room at the rear of the church following the demolition of a redundant sacristy which previously occupied the site, and refurbishment of the church itself. An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16 and the Local Plan policy, as the application site lies within an area of archaeological potential.

The watching brief was commissioned by Dr A Amato Ltd. on behalf of the Parish of St John's. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer.

2 Background (Fig. 1)

Wallingford is located in an area which contains some of the most important archaeological complexes in the Thames Valley. The town may possibly have had a Roman precursor, and the presence of a Saxon cemetery predating the 9th-century defensive works may indicate a settlement in the vicinity. Wallingford Castle was constructed after the Norman Conquest, eight pre-existing properties being destroyed in order to do so. The 1086 Domesday Survey records 491 houses in Wallingford with a mint, a market and a guildhall. Wallingford was the second largest *burh* in Berkshire and played a prominent role in the conflict between King Stephen and Empress Mathilda. The town was extremely prosperous until the 13th-century after which it began a slow and steady decline, reaching its lowest point in the 16th-century. The town's fortunes revived in the 19th-century, after the opening of the canal to Bath and Birmingham.

Wood Street, St Mary's Street and the east side of the Market Place are all thought to be a part of the rectilinear street pattern contemporary with the defences of the Saxon *burh*; the street pattern was laid out at the *burh*'s foundation. This area also formed the core of the later medieval settlement. In 1786 the development site, then occupied by a private house, was acquired by the Presbyterians, who converted the house into a chapel in 1791. A new Congregational chapel was constructed in 1799, which saw continuous occupation until 1881. After this date the site saw both religious and secular use until it was acquired by the Catholic Church in the early part of this century. The Congregational Church maintained a burial ground on the development site for sixty years, the last recorded burial being in 1860.

A ground investigation was undertaken on the site in order to inform the planning application. It comprised the excavation of three trial pits, which located the presence

of made ground varying in depth from 1.26 m in the south-eastern part of the site to 2.90 m immediately adjacent to the south wall of the standing church building. The made ground appeared to consist of levelling and destruction layers, which overlay earlier structures and occupation surfaces. The trial pit logs describe the made ground as containing brick, tile and ceramic fragments throughout as well as large rectangular boulders and cobbles. Animal bone and shell were also seen. The second test pit was aborted at 700 mm, due to the presence of a buried structure. The exact nature of this feature remains unknown at this time.

The site lies at approximately 49 m OD, and the subsoil is alluvial gravel and sand of the Thames terraces, overlying Lower Chalk. A layer of made ground covers the site, varying in thickness from 1.26 m to 2.90 m. Land use immediately prior to development was as the garden of the Presbytery.

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; site clearance and the excavation of the grave shafts was undertaken by JCB mechanical excavator.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features 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 utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Figs 2 & 3)

The initial visit to site, subsequent to site clearance, confirmed the presence of three horizontal memorial slabs (Fig. 2), numbered as (4), (5) and (6). Slab (6) lay below topsoil (3), confined to the garden area. Slabs (4) and (5) lay below a concrete plinth (2), from the demolished building, and made ground, essentially a mixture of concrete and brick fragments with some topsoil. (1). This deposit was confined to the footprint of the demolished building.

Slab 4.

A rectangular single piece of limestone, slab 4 was oriented north-east/south-west and measured 1.84 m by 0.75 m by 0.09 m. An engraving of a ?Maltese Cross was noted at the north-eastern end of the stone. The slab generally was well-finished with bevelled sides, albeit slightly damaged at its south-western end. The inscription read: "Thomas Hammond, born August 31 1814, died Jan 14 1860".

Slab 4 was pulled to one side (by JCB) to reveal a shaft backfilled with very mixed material comprising a light brown/buff silty clay loam with occasional red housebrick and white china fragments. Three or four mortared limestone slabs were encountered at 1.25 m depth; these appeared to be supported by further slabs/bricks set on edge and excavation was suspended at this point. Cleaning revealed a structure, (7), 1.95 m long by 0.80 m wide by approximately 0.50 m deep. It was rectangular with brick walls and a roof consisting of four mortared rectangular slabs with shaped edges. The northernmost end extended beyond the confines of the trench but was not exposed due to logistical difficulties. The slabs were not lifted, however an examination of the interior by torch and mirror revealed a single lead coffin of triple-shell construction with the head to the north-west. The coffin appeared to be intact with traces of hair apparent; this was presumed to be horsehair packing.

Slab 5.

A rectangular single piece of limestone, slab 5 was also oriented north-east/south-west and measured 1.70 m by 0.78 m. The slab was undecorated and appeared very deteriorated in places. The inscription read: "John Oldham, died Nov 7 185[1] (or [7]). Aged 65 years".

Slab 5 was pulled to one side by JCB to reveal a shaft backfilled with identical mixed material to that seen beneath (4), although here it appeared to be very slightly darker in colour. Further mortared slabs were encountered at 1.10 m depth, and excavation was again suspended at this point. Cleaning revealed a further structure, numbered as (8), 1.55 m in length by 0.97 m in width by c. 1.50 m deep (approximately). It was rectangular with walls constructed of frogged bricks (typically measuring 0.22 x 0.12 x 0.07 m) with a roof comprising three mortared slabs with a fourth continuing beyond the edge of the trench: again, this slab was not fully exposed. All the slabs were roughly rectangular with shaped edges. It was noted that the south-easternmost stone had a partially surviving mortice hole, and the slab measured 0.06 m thick at this point. Inspection by torch and mirror appeared to indicate a single lead coffin within the structure; it appeared to be in very poor condition and had largely disintegrated.

Slab 6.

A single piece of white marble, 0.03 m thick, it was unclear as to whether this stone was *in-situ* as it was recovered during the topsoil strip. The inscription read: "Sacred to the Memory of Mary Redford Harris, wife of the Revd. William Harris, for forty years Minister of this Chapel. Also of their three daughters Sarah, Rebecca & Elizabeth. The Vault lies beneath this Tablet". No vault was encountered as the approximate position of slab 6 lay outside the main development area. Its precise whereabouts remain unknown at this time.

6 Finds

No finds were retrieved during the course of the watching brief.

7 Environmental results

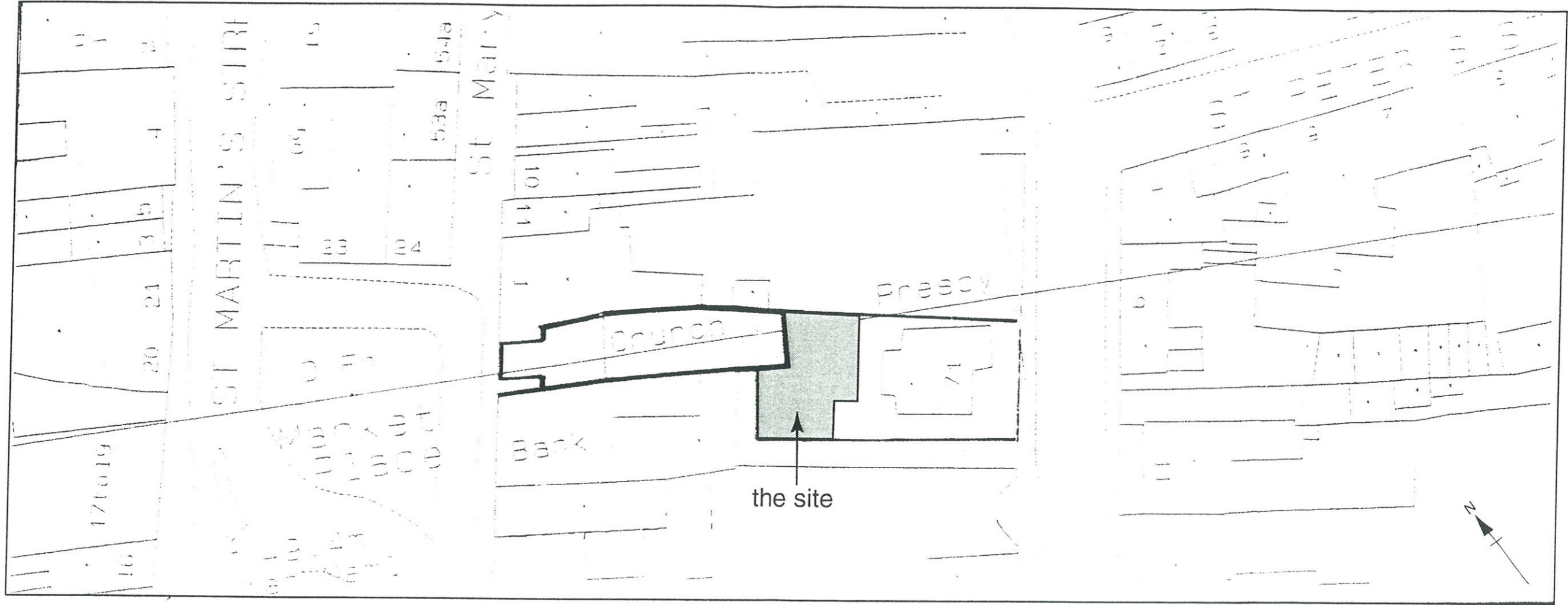
Due to the absence of any significant archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

The redesign of the foundations for the new building has ensured minimal disturbance to *in situ* deposits on the site; both uncovered burials were reburied on completion of the archaeological investigation and will remain undisturbed.

References.

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



scale 1:500

figure 1: site location

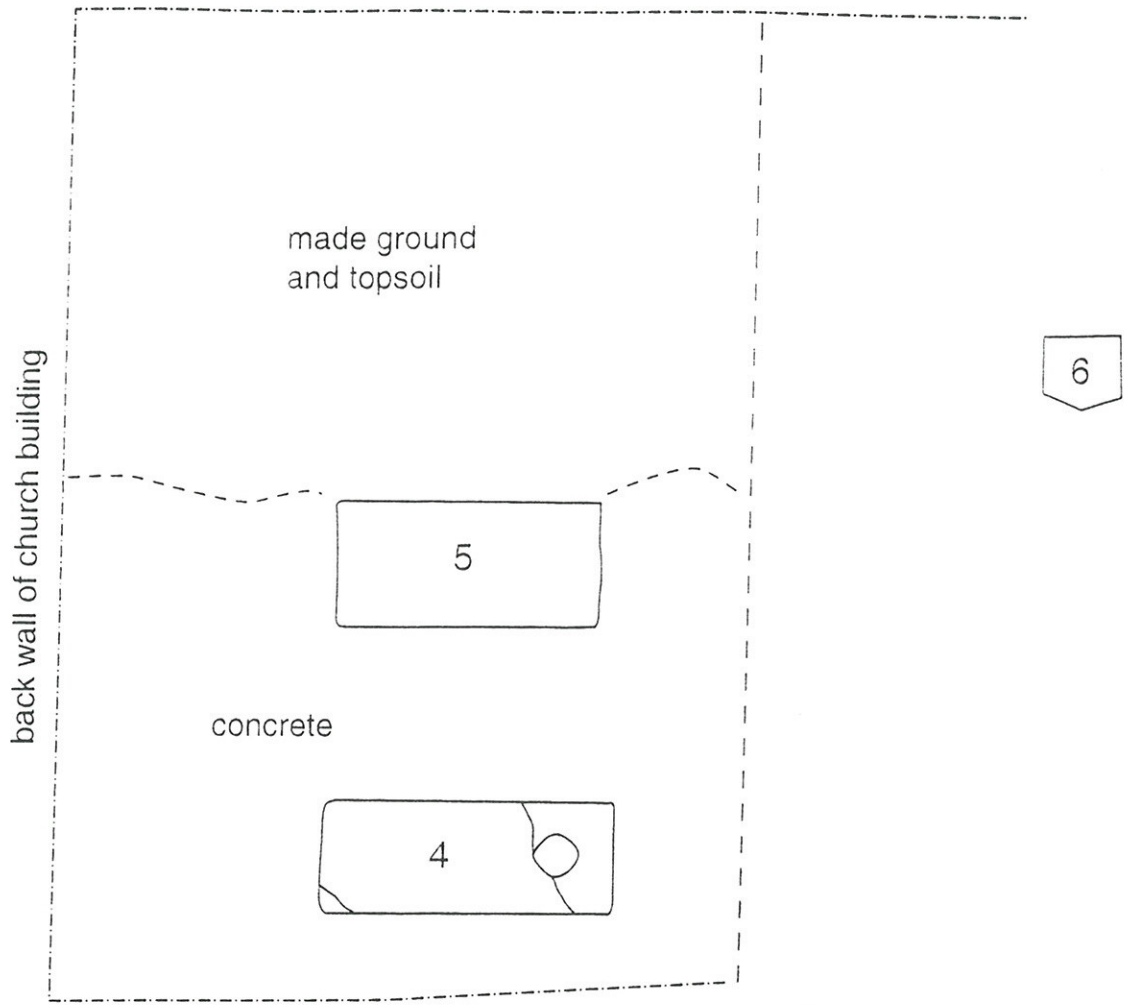


figure 2: memorial slabs



scale 1:50

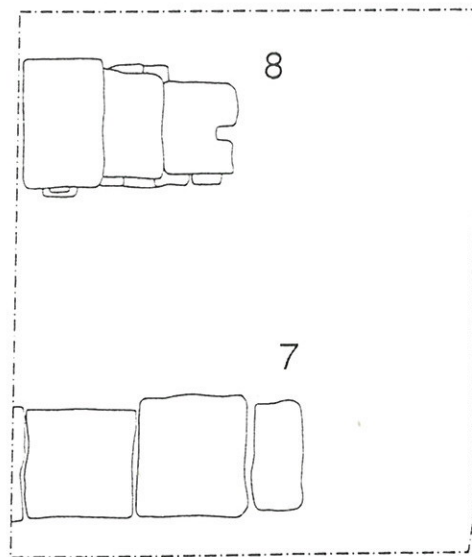


figure 3: stone cists



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