

St Giles in the Fields Camden London



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

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of St Giles in the Fields**

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ST GILES IN THE FIELDS, LONDON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
FOR
ST GILES IN THE FIELDS PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Summary

In July and August 2004, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief in parts of the northern, and southern churchyard of St Giles in the Fields Church, Camden, London (NGR TQ 2996 3026). The work was commissioned by Molyneux Kerr Architects, on behalf of their client, the Parochial Church Council, in advance of the laying of new services for the church. Three service trenches were excavated: Trench 1 in the northern churchyard, Trench 2 in the eastern churchyard and Trench 3 in the western churchyard. The watching brief revealed a small quantity of scattered charnel in all three trenches. This was collected for reburial. An earlier brick wall was discovered in Trench 2. This may have been associated with the earlier post-medieval church which preceded the present Georgian structure on the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief in the northern, eastern and western churchyards of St Giles in the Fields church, Camden, London, between 30 July and 3 August, and on the 18 August 2004. The work was commissioned by Molyneux Kerr Architects, on behalf of their client, the Parochial Church Council, in respect of a planning application for restoration and modernisation of the current church structure (Planning Application No. CM0013/0mc). The current watching brief concerned the excavation of three trenches for the laying of new services in the northern, eastern and western churchyards.

1.2. Site location, topography and geology

1.2.1. The Grade I listed church is located in the parish of St Giles in the Field in the London Borough of Camden at NGR TQ 2996 3026. It sits within its own churchyard which is bounded by St Giles High Street to the north, St Giles Passage to the south, Flitcroft Street to the west and New Compton Street to the east (Figure 1).

1.2.2. The geology of the area is Lynch Hill gravel (BGS Sheet 256) which is one of a number of gravels forming part of the post-diversionary Thames River Terrace deposits; gravel, sandy and clayey in part.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1. The archaeological background was produced as part of the earlier desk-based assessment (OA 2004). A brief summary is produced below.

2.1.2. The earliest church to be founded on the site of St Giles in the Fields was the small chapel attached to a leper hospital, founded in 1107 by Queen Matilda, the wife of Henry I. In addition to administering to the spiritual needs of the afflicted lepers, the hospital chapel also served as a parish church. It appears to have continued its parochial functions throughout the Middle Ages. It is uncertain how extensive the alterations to the architecture of the original chapel were in the intervening centuries, or even whether any elements of the original church survived. A plan of 1560 shows that at that time the church possessed a circular tower. This tower was removed in 1617 and replaced with a steeple from which bells were hung. The Vestry minutes of the 8th of August 1623 mentions that the church possessed a nave and chancel, both with pillars, clerestory walls and aisles on either side. In this period the footprint of the building measured 153 by 65 feet.

2.1.3. In 1623, the church was in so ruinous a state as to be declared unsafe and was pulled down. A new church was erected on the site, and was consecrated in 1631. The footprint of this larger church measured 123 feet in length and 57 feet in width. Several additions were made to this structure, such as a western gallery. The new church did not prosper, however, and by 1715 was in such a state of damp and decay that a petition was made to have the church entirely rebuilt at public expense. The church was demolished in 1731, and the present church designed and built by Henry Flitcroft (a disciple of James Gibbs). Several additions to the original structure, were made in the 19th century, such as a robing room, and the Rate's and Verger's vestries. A narrow passageway was also constructed between the stairs to the south lobby and the rector's vestry in the western churchyard.

3. PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aims

- 3.1.1. The development proposals were as follows
- the demolition of the passageway (constructed 1899) between the south lobby of the church and the Rector's Vestry
 - the provision of a new drain (depth 0.75 m) running from the Verger's Vestry and Rate's Vestry to the existing drain in the eastern churchyard.
- 3.1.2. The archaeological desk-based assessment concluded that the development proposals could be adequately mitigated by a watching brief.
- 3.1.3. The watching brief aimed to identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development, paying particular attention to the existence of earth cut and brick-lined shaft graves in the churchyards. The results of the archaeological investigation were to be made available to the client and to the SMR.

3.2. Methodology

- 3.2.1. An archaeologist observed the hand excavation of three pipe trenches within the northern, eastern and western churchyards. The location of the trenches in relation to the present church is shown in Figure 2.
- 3.2.2. All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:10.
- 3.2.3. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made in black and white and colour. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

Trench 1

- 3.2.4. This service trench was located in the northern part of the churchyard, and extended eastwards from the steps to the Rate's Vestry, following the line of the northern church wall for 12 m. The trench was 0.36 m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.65 m.

Trench 2

- 3.2.5. In the eastern churchyard, a second trench was excavated to a depth of 0.60 m in order to relay a new drain. Trench 2 extended from Manhole 6 for 7 m to the north following the line of the eastern wall of the church. The course of the trench then turned at 90 degrees towards the west, truncating wall 4 (which supports a row of York paving slabs and inscribed ledger stones) and entering the Rate's vestry from the east. The width of the trench varied between 0.40 and 0.60 m.

Trench 3

- 3.2.6. Following the demolition of the passage to the Rector's Vestry in the western churchyard, a pipe trench was hand excavated immediately to the west of the existing external stairs of the church. The trench extended for 5.3 m between the southern church wall and the northern wall of the rector's vestry on a north-south orientation. Trench 3 was between 0.35-0.45 m in width and dug to a maximum depth of 0.32 below the level of the paved surface around the trench.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Description of deposits

Trench 1

- 4.1.1. In the northern churchyard, two layers were observed during the excavation of Trench 1. Layer 2 was the lower of the two. This deposit was composed of a fairly compact, slightly sticky layer of sandy silt with a very high organic component. The deposit is probably formed by topsoil and subsoil disturbed by the numerous burials that had taken place within the churchyard over the centuries. It extended across Trench 1. The deposit was only dug to the level of impact, to a depth of 0.30 m. A small number of disarticulated human and animal bones were discovered within this fill. Clay pipe shaft fragments were also present, as was small quantities of loose ceramic building material. Layer 2 was overlaid by layer 1, a loose dark black brown sandy silt with a high organic content. This soil was modern garden soil, still in use within the present-day flowerbeds. The layer contained less charnel and animal bone than layer 2. Pottery from this deposit appeared modern. No earth-cut graves or structures were observed in Trench 1.

Trench 2

- 4.1.2. In the eastern churchyard, Trench 2 cut through an area paved with York stone slabs. The earliest structure revealed within the trench was a short 0.55 m section of brick and mortar wall located at the northernmost extent of Trench 2 (Figure 3). The wall was orientated east-west, but appeared to turn to the north approximately 2.7 m to the east of the present church wall. The wall was composed of a double thickness of pinkish-orange unfrogged bricks (22 mm x 10 mm x 7 mm) bonded by a soft crumbly yellow-grey mortar. The finish was rough. Two courses of the brickwork were revealed, the uppermost being 0.28 m below the level of the present-day ground surface. The full depth of the structure is unknown. To the west, wall 6 extended beneath structure 4, clearly pre-dating it. It is difficult to interpret the function of wall 6, but it is quite probable that it may be a remnant of one of the earlier post-medieval church buildings known to predate the present church.
- 4.1.3. Overlying wall 6 to the west was a 0.3 m deep deposit of hard grey cement (7), which functioned as the foundation for wall 4. Two courses of wall 4 could be observed above ground running parallel with the eastern wall of the church, approximately 2.2 m east of the wall. A second parallel wall (11) was present immediately adjacent to the church. These low walls functioned as supports for approximately 16 inscribed ledger stones and York paving slabs, which had been laid out horizontally against the eastern wall of the church. Wall 4 was composed of a double thickness of brick and mortar. The bricks were unfrogged, pale pinkish orange (220 mm x 70 mm x 80 mm) bonded with hard, pale grey mortar. The four courses were Flemish bonded with abraded flush pointing. Wall 11 was contemporary and of similar construction.
- 4.1.4. The space between these two parallel walls had been backfilled to the level of the uppermost course with loose dark grey-black sandy silt 5. This fill contained a fairly high proportion of ceramic building material and mortar rubble (c.10%) and three large limestone slab fragments. Disarticulated animal bone was also found in this fill. Ledger 3 overlaid this fill, supported by walls 4 and 11. The ledger was of York stone. The upper surface was very weathered, the inscription on its surface being almost completely obliterated and illegible. The ledger was clearly commemorative and probably originally overlay a brick-lined shaft grave or family burial plot elsewhere within the churchyard. From the numerous gravestones lining the perimeter of the churchyard, it is evident that the churchyard had been landscaped at some point in the recent past, and that many memorials had been relocated.
- 4.1.5. The bulk of the material within Trench 2 was made ground (10). This deposit overlaid wall 6 and abutted wall 3. It was composed of compact dark brown-grey sandy silt, with a fairly

high organic content. A large proportion of this deposit consisted of fragments of brick and mortar (constituting approximately 30% of the deposit). This made ground probably acted as a foundation layer for the paved area around the eastern and southern walls of the church. It was overlaid by 0.05 m thick layer of loose yellow sand. This sand acted as the levelling layer for the York paving slabs (8) overlay it.

Trench 3

- 4.1.6. Trench 3 was flush against the northern wall of the external stairs leading to the south lobby of the church from the western churchyard and Rector's Vestry. The trench revealed an additional course of the stonework of staircase 12, but the foundations or footings were not exposed at this depth. The well dressed stone blocks were bonded with crumbly white-grey mortar, and neatly pointed, in keeping with stonework above.
- 4.1.7. Trench 3 also revealed four deposits all of which extended across the area of excavation. The lowermost layer (16) was a 0.07 m deep sticky compact dark brown clayey silt containing occasional fragments of ceramic building material and mortar (c. 5%). Although no structures or earth-cut graves were identified, the presence of small amounts of charnel suggest that burials are likely to be located in the close vicinity. Deposit 16 was overlaid by a fairly compact dark brown sandy silt (15) containing small quantities of ceramic building material and mortar (c.10%). Deposit 16 extended across the trench to a depth of 0.22 m. Finds within deposits 15 and 16 suggest that they were much disturbed in the later post-medieval and modern periods, possibly during grave digging and also during the laying of services. Four water pipes cut through layer 15. No structures or graves were observed in plan.
- 4.1.8. A thin layer of loose yellow sand (14), which contained small inclusions of building rubble, overlaid deposit (15). This 0.02 m deep layer served as a levelling layer for the York paving (13) *in situ* around the church.
- 4.1.9. **Finds**
- 4.1.10. Several sherds of post-medieval pottery were discovered in contexts 1 and 10 in Trench 2. White glazed ware and willow pattern suggests a Victorian to modern date. Several shafts of clay pipe were also present. Ceramics were not retained for analysis.
- 4.1.11. Similarly, in deposit 16 in the western churchyard, clay pipe fragments, glass, and post-medieval pottery sherds and small quantities of animal bone were recovered. None of the above were retained.

4.2. Palaeo-environmental remains

- 4.2.1. A small quantity of charnel was scattered throughout context 1 and 2 in Trench 1, context 10 in Trench 2, and contexts 15 and 16 in Trench 3. This bone was collected for reburial elsewhere in the churchyard. Occasional disarticulated animal bone was also found scattered within these fills, but this was not retained.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1. No earth-cut or brick-lined shaft graves were revealed by the excavation of Trenches 1, 2 and 3 in the northern, eastern and western churchyards, respectively. A small quantity of charnel and animal bone was recovered. The charnel was reburied on site. A short length of subterranean brick wall was uncovered within Trench 2, and may have been part of one of the earlier post-medieval church buildings on the site. No other features or structures were revealed.

Oxford Archaeology
September 2004

Appendix One Archaeological Context Inventory

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.30 m	1.20 m		Loose, dark brown organic silty layer containing occasional CBM fragments	Charnel, animal bone, pottery
2	Layer	0.35 m			More compact dark brown silt with high organic content	Charnel, animal bone, pottery
3	Structure	0.13 m	0.78 m	2.0 m	Ledger of York stone bearing illegible inscription	
4	Structure			0.46 m	Double thickness brick and mortar wall underlying ledger 3.	
5	Fill				Dark grey-black sandy silt with CBM	Animal bone and pottery
6	Structure		0.50 m	0.18 m	Double thickness brick and mortar wall	
7	Structure	0.30 m			Hard grey concrete foundation for (4)	
8	Structure	0.05 m	0.90 m		York stone paving slab	
9	Layer	0.05 m			Levelling layer of loose yellow sand	
10	Fill	0.550m			Deliberate backfill of graveyard soil and CBM rubble	Human and animal bone; Victorian pottery
11	Structure			0.44 m	Low double thickness wall of bricks and mortar	
12	Structure		3.2 m	1.42 m	Northern stone wall for southern staircase	
13	Structure	0.08 m	0.5-0.8m		York paving slabs within western churchyard	
14	Layer	0.02 m			Loose yellow sand levelling layer for (13)	Small fragments of CBM
15	Deposit	0.22 m			Fairly compact organic rich disturbed graveyard soil	Post-medieval pottery, clay pipe, animal bone, glass, charnel
16	Deposit	0.07 m			Lowermost deposit in trench 3- disturbed graveyard soil	As for (15)

Appendix Two Bibliography and References

Oxford Archaeology 2004 St Giles in the Fields, Camden, London, Archaeological desk based assessment

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Site Manual*, Oxford Archaeology

Appendix Three Summary of Site Details

Site name: St Giles in the Fields Church, Camden, London

Site code: SGI 04

Grid reference: TQ 2996 3026

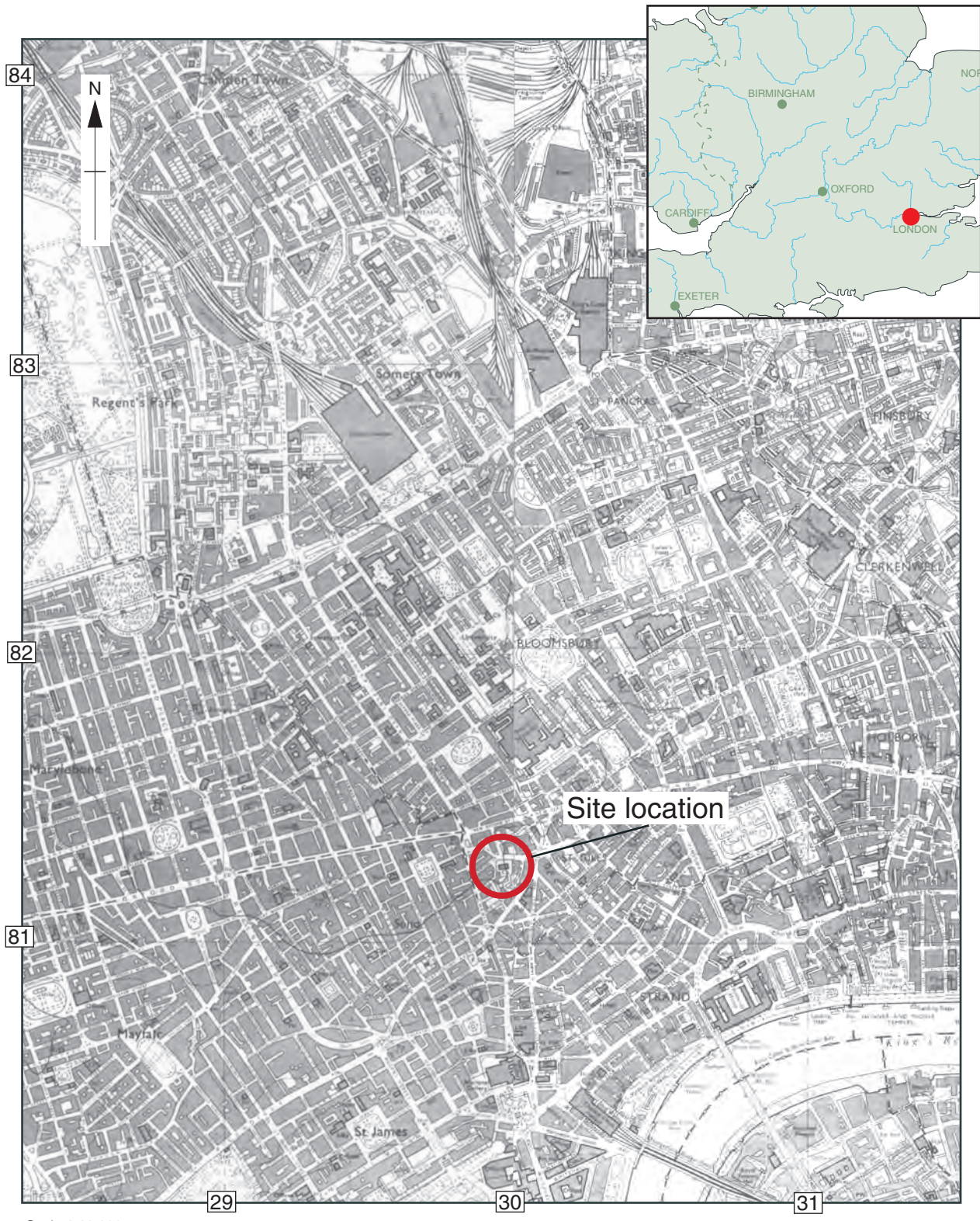
Type of watching brief: recording the excavation of three pipe trenches

Date and duration of project: 30/7/04- 3/8/04 and 18/8/04

Area of site: 11.71 m²

Summary of results: No graves were observed within the three pipe trenches. Small amounts of charnel and animal bone were recovered. In Trench 2 in the eastern churchyard a small section of post-medieval wall was uncovered. This wall may relate to an earlier post-medieval building phase of the church.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Museum of London Archives Department in due course.



Scale 1:10,000

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Figure 1: Site location

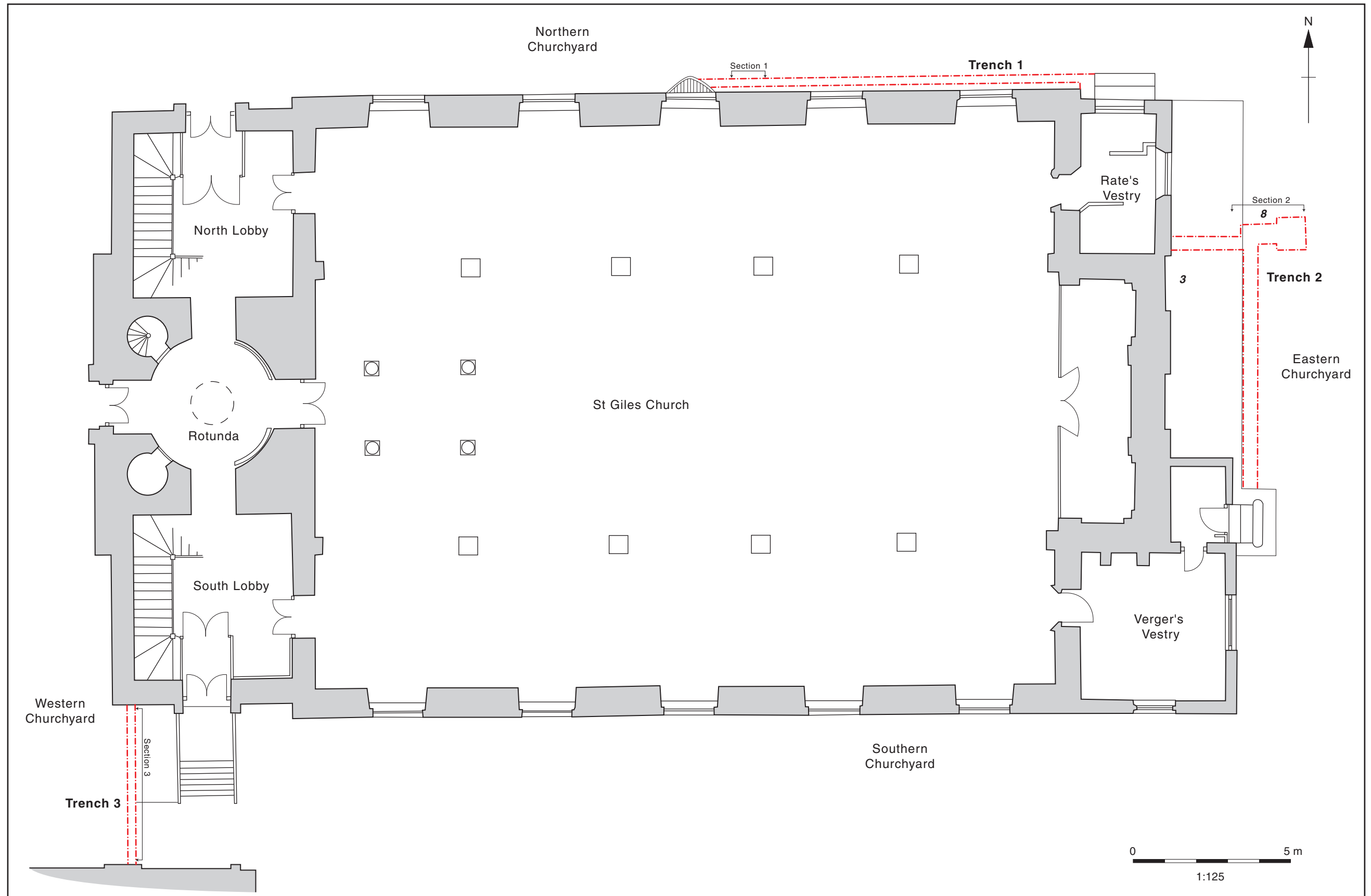


Figure 2: The location of trenches 1, 2 and 3 within the churchyard of St Giles in the Fields, Camden

Trench 2
Section 2

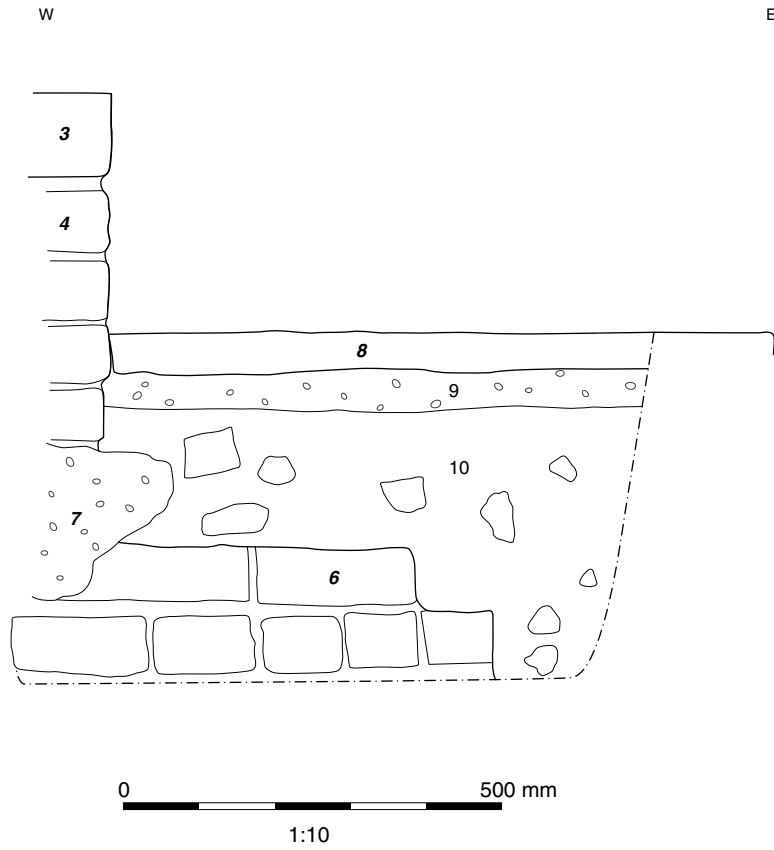


Figure 3: South-facing elevation showing walls 4 and 6

Trench 3
Section 3

N

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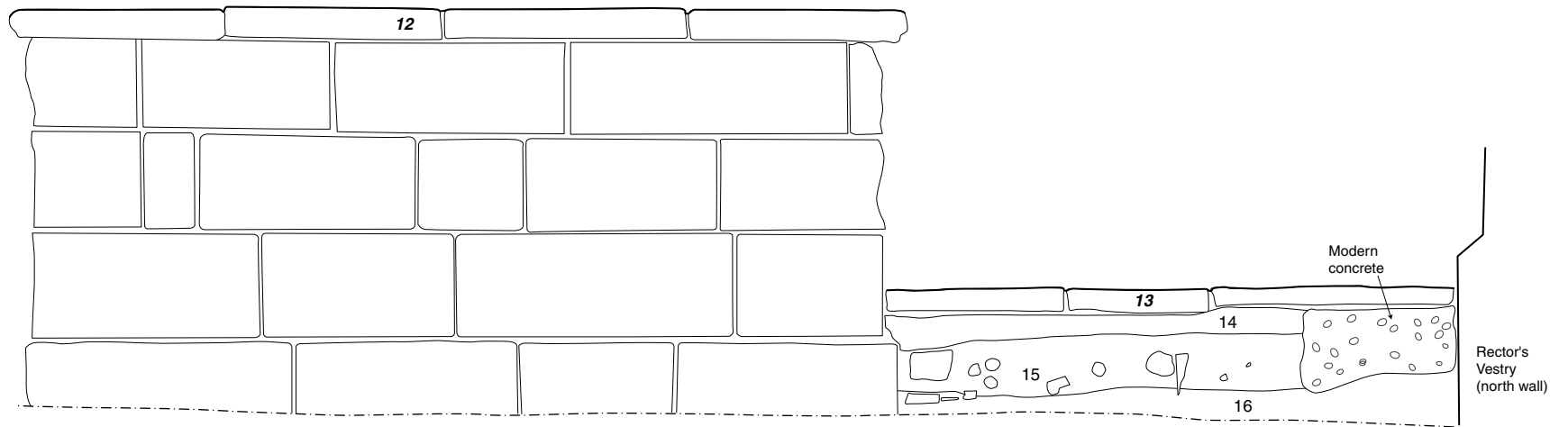


Figure 4: West-facing section through Trench 3 showing staircase 12