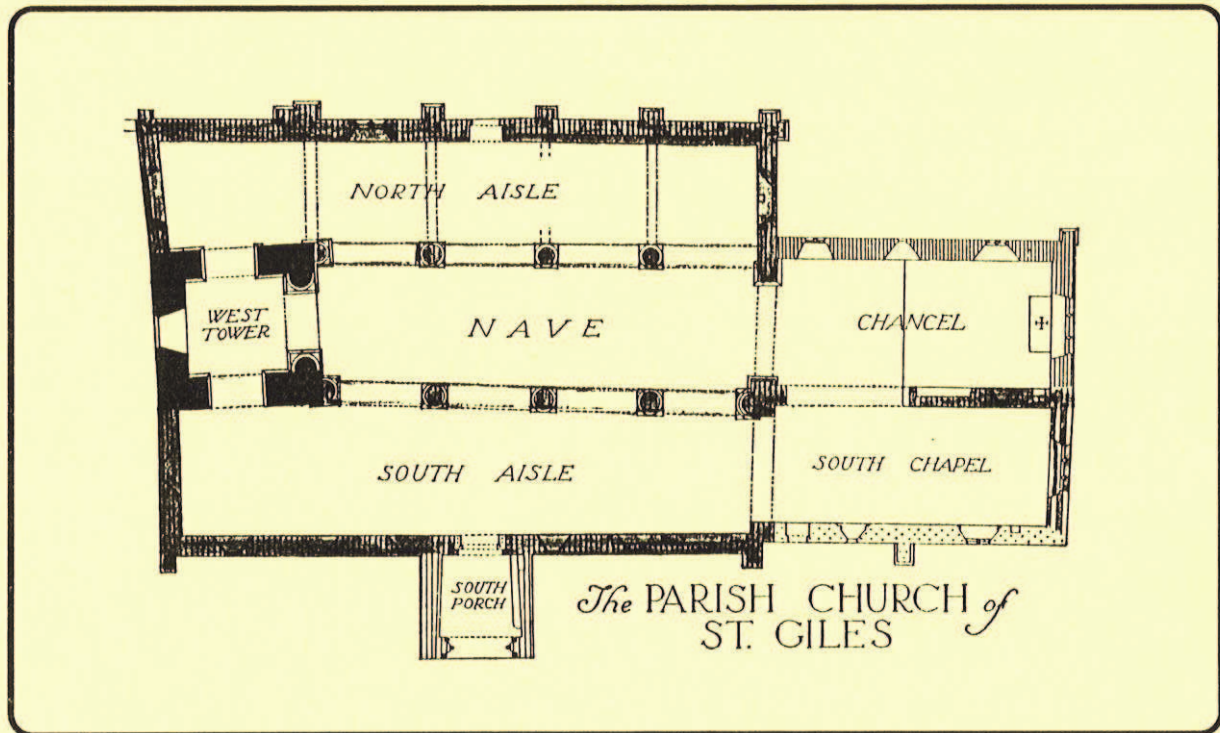


St. Giles' Church, Oxford

NGR SP 5113 0698

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

August 1996

ST. GILES' CHURCH, OXFORD
NGR SP 5113 0698
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 SUMMARY

Redeposited medieval and post-medieval pottery, and medieval decorated floor tiles were recovered from contractors' excavations in the grounds of this church. Two ?Victorian pit features which contained disarticulated human remains were examined in the course of the groundwork. The excavated soil from the trenches and pit contained a substantial quantity of loose human bones, which were replaced in the service trenches.

2 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 drainage system north of the Chancel and the North Aisle of the building (Fig. 2). Three trenches and two soakaway pits were monitored for the presence of features and finds. The trenches were excavated by contractors under plans devised by Thomas Rayson Partnership Architects of Oxford. The work in the church grounds was monitored during two visits to the site in July 1996. This report summarises the archaeological aspects of the work. Each feature or layer was assigned a unique context number (starting at 1000), and this information is presented in table form at the end of the report.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St. Giles' Church dates to the Norman period, although little of the original fabric of the building survives. The church was first mentioned in 1138. Many additions were made to the building in the thirteenth century, but 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).

4 RESULTS

4.1 NORTH OF THE CHANCEL

Two trenches were excavated by the contractors which extended from the north wall of the chancel to a soakaway pit. The trenches were c 0.45 m wide and were 0.60 m deep. The soakaway pit was 1 m deep (Fig. 3).

The lowest deposit identified in this part of the churchyard was a layer of white-grey gravel with patches of sand (1002), which was interpreted as the natural geological horizon. The top of the natural was observed 0.85 m below the ground surface. Above 1002 was a 0.70 m thick layer of friable reddish-brown sandy loam (1001), which

contained frequent redeposited human bones. Fragments of decorated floor tile were also present in this layer, which also produced nineteenth century pottery. Layer 1001 was sealed by the present topsoil (1000), which was a light grey sandy loam, 0.15 m thick, which included pieces of modern tile and occasional human bones.

4.2 NORTH OF THE NORTH AISLE

A single service trench was dug from the north face of the chancel wall. The trench led to a soakaway pit to the north. Here the level of the churchyard rises by c 0.50 m with a sharp slope/bank. This seems to be the result of landscaping in the church grounds, rather than a natural change in the local topography of the site.

The service trench was 0.40 m deep near to the church, and deepened to 0.80 m where the trench was cut through the steep bank. As a result of the raised land level, the soakaway pit was dug to a depth of 1.60 m (Fig. 4, section and plan).

The lowest deposit in the trench near the church was a layer of light grey sandy loam (1008) which contained disarticulated human bones, and also contained medieval and post-medieval pottery sherds. Immediately south of the soakaway pit this layer was at least 0.56 m thick.

Natural gravel was observed at a depth of 1.55 m within the soakaway pit. The natural was cut by a large pit feature, 1010, whose limits extended outside the confines of the soakaway pit. Pit 1010 was at least 1.2 m deep and 0.75 m+ wide. The profile of the feature was not observed. The pit was filled by 1005, a deposit of friable reddish-brown sandy loam. The fill appeared to be consistent within the pit and contained human bones, stones and gravel.

Pit fill 1005 was cut by another large deep pit, 1007. This feature was at least 1.25 m deep and c 1 m wide (north-south). The pit had a near vertical north edge. The south edge of the pit was obscured by a modern service cable. The eastward extent of the pit was not observed.

The lowest deposit within the pit was 1006, which was a collection of disarticulated human remains including parts of three skulls, and an assortment of other bones. These were not removed from the pit, but were recorded and photographed *in situ*. Above 1006 was the main fill of the pit, 1003, a homogeneous deposit of light grey-brown sandy loam which included some human bones and limestone pieces.

A modern service pipe (1009) was set into the upper part of fill 1003, which was in turn sealed by the present topsoil (1004), which is deeper on the raised bank to the north of the chancel (0.25 m).

5 THE FINDS

Finds were recovered from two similar contexts, the layers 1008 and 1001. Layer 1008 produced three sherds of pottery, one of medieval date, one probably late medieval or

early post-medieval and one 19th century. Three further sherds, two of medieval date and one 18th-19th century, came from layer 1001, together with two fragments of a medieval decorated floor tile, one of roof tile (perhaps also medieval), an iron nail and a piece of oyster shell.

The finds are from deposits which probably date to the 19th century, in which the medieval material is clearly residual.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The results from this watching brief were limited in nature. No structural features relating to the church were observed. No intact burials were disturbed during the work.

The pits observed within the deep soakaway to the north of the North Aisle were probably dug to re-inter disturbed human remains (probably the result of grave digging elsewhere within the churchyard). Pit 1007 was clearly dug from below the level of the present topsoil, and although the pit fill was undated, is probably of Victorian date. The date of the earlier pit 1010 is also unknown, but a Victorian date seems likely.

The general mixed soil layers (1001, 1008) below the topsoil which contained residual bones and finds of mixed date are the result of continuous grave digging within the churchyard. A sizeable number of disarticulated bones were seen within the excavated soil from the trenches, which testifies to the extended use of this churchyard for human burials.

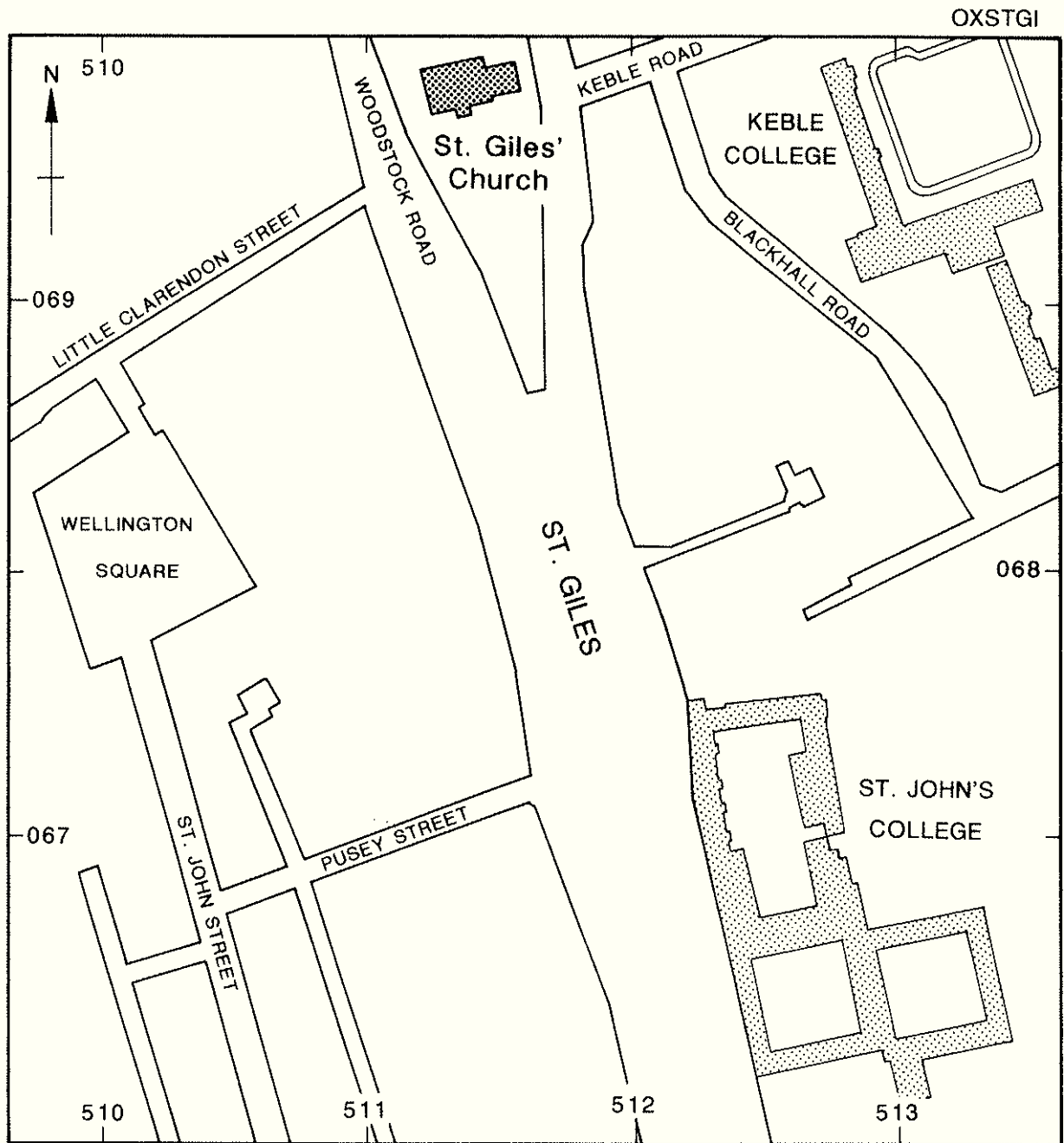
7 REFERENCE

Pevsner, N. and Sherwood, J. *Oxfordshire, The Buildings of England*, 1974

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Oxford Archaeological Unit
August, 1996

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

CONTEXT	TYPE	DEPTH	WIDTH	COMMENTS
1000	Layer	0.15 m	-	Topsoil at NE end of Chancel
1001	Layer	0.7 m	-	Churchyard soil, NE end of Chancel
1002	Layer	0.1 m +	-	Natural gravel
1003	Fill	1.25 m +	1.0 m	Fill of charnel pit 1007
1004	Layer	0.25 m	-	Topsoil to N of Chancel
1005	Layer	1.15 m +	0.7 m +	Fill of ?charnel pit 1010
1006	Deposit	-	-	Disarticulated human remains at base of 1007, included parts of three skulls
1007	Cut	1.25 m +	1.0 m	Charnel pit, N of Chancel. Cuts fill of 1010
1008	Layer	0.53 m +	-	Churchyard soil N of chancel, similar to 1001
1009	Service	-	-	Modern service pipe and trench cut into fill of 1007
1010	Cut	1.2 m	0.75 m +	?Charnel pit, fill contained fewer bones than 1007



scale 1:2500

Figure 1

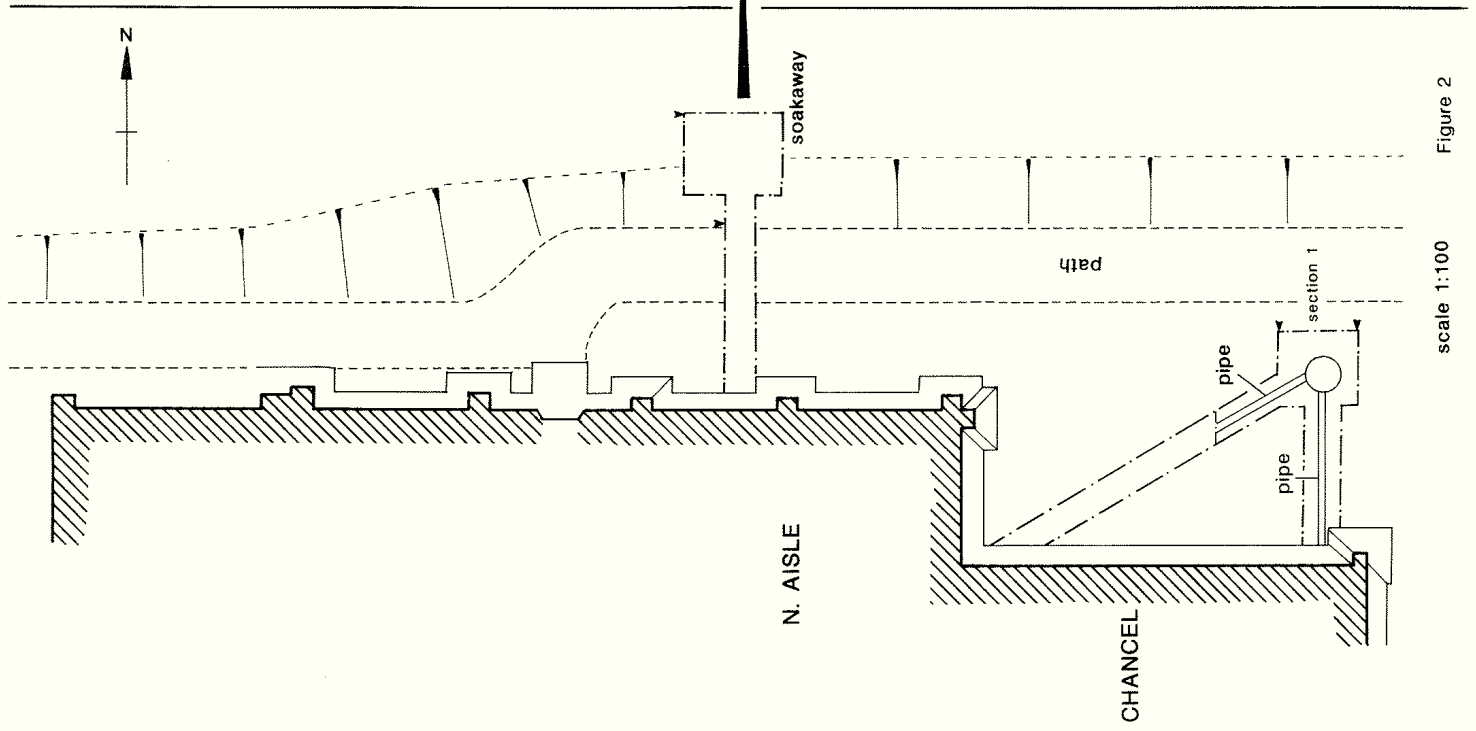


Figure 2
scale 1:100

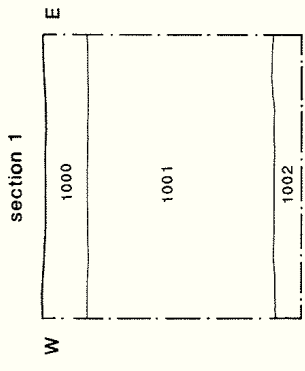


Figure 3

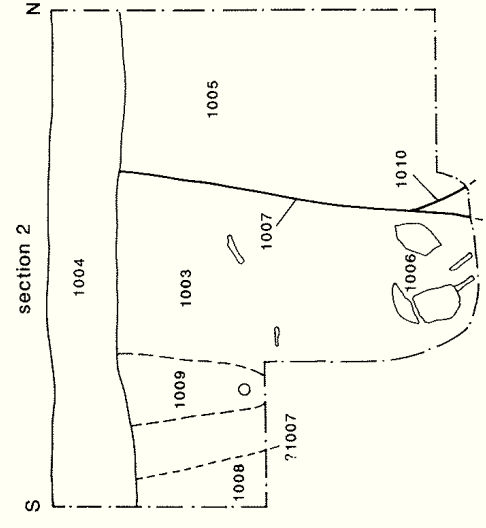
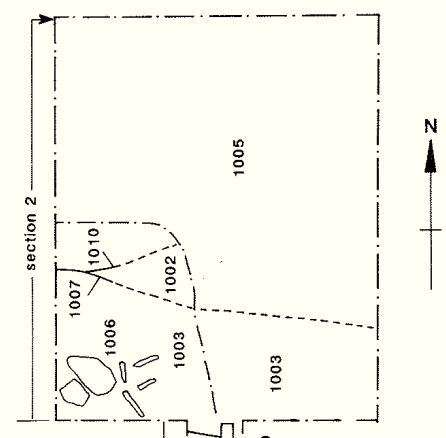


Figure 4





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