

All Saints Church Shirburn, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation: Part 1



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

September 1995

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, SHIRBURN, NR. WATLINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT NGR SU 6965 9592

SUMMARY

A small scale investigations consisting of a single trial pit revealed the foundations of the Tower and North Aisle walls. The impact of a blocked drain against the Tower wall and its effect on the wall render was also investigated. The churchyard soil in the area of the investigation overlaid the natural subsoil, and contained a substantial quantity of construction debris.

1 INTRODUCTION

Shirburn is a small village situated to the NW of the small town of Watlington [Fig. 1]. All Saints church is redundant and has recently been vested in the Churches Conservation Trust. The exterior and interior is being renovated under a detailed specification drawn up by Carden and Godfrey, architects of Long Acre, London. Under Section 3.2.7 of the Specification the consulting engineers (Price and Myers of London) required information about the nature of the church foundations, and the type of soils present in the churchyard. Accordingly, a test pit was excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) in September 1995, at the west end of the church at the junction of the north wall of the Tower and west wall of the North Aisle. A second test hole was excavated against the north wall of the Tower. The existing ground level is at approximately 108 m OD.

The specification also requires the archaeological recording of the exposed masonry of the Tower after it has been stripped of all rendering. This work will be undertaken in due course and will be the subject of a separate report.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

All Saints is a small church with stuccoed (rendered) walls and a plain interior. The church is situated to the south of Shirburn Castle (the stately home of successive Earls of Macclesfield), which was built in the late 1370s. The church is of Norman construction, however little of the Norman detail survives: the original masonry could remain beneath the stucco. The tower and the rest of the church are of 13th and 14th century date, with a number of 19th century additions. The north transept was built in the early 19th century, and was used by the Macclesfield family. The church was restored by T.H. Wyatt in 1876, at the expense of the Earl of Macclesfield.

3 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION [Fig. 2]

What was thought to be natural subsoil was uncovered 0.65 m below the ground level. The soil (6) was a dark brown sandy clay loam, and was very clean. The base of the foundation (10) of the North Aisle wall (7) was observed at this depth. The foundation consisted of a mix of whole flint nodules and chalk pieces bonded in a matrix of sand and mortar. The foundation was 0.52 m deep, and supported the wall proper.

The southward extent of this foundation was truncated by the insertion of later foundation material for a buttress (4) at the junction of the North Aisle wall and the Tower. Foundation 3 was between 0.38 m and 0.52 m thick, and consisted of a concreted block of sand, mortar, flint and brick. The base of the buttress was offset by one course of bricks at its west face, but there was no comparable offset at its north face. The buttress was constructed of red bricks, some of which show where the stucco has fallen away from the Tower wall.

The excavated soil (2) below the topsoil was a mixed grey sandy loam containing a substantial quantity of flint pieces, brick and tile fragments, and willow pattern pottery (of 18th-19th century date). The mixed nature of this deposit suggests that it derives from both the original construction of this church, and the addition of the buttress. The method of construction of both of these was not obvious, but probably involved the removal and reinstatement of soil layers in the area.

A small hole was excavated against the north wall of the Tower, which revealed that the foundation material (8) was of the same type as that below the North Aisle wall. The flint and chalk footing was observed to be at least 0.35 m deep.

The base of an iron downpipe (11) against the north face of the Tower wall was investigated: the pipe was found to be blocked with leaves which had the effect of causing the pipe to fracture at a number of places, with the result that water was seeping down the walls from the cracks in the pipe. The base of the pipe was sunk into a concrete block soakaway.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Little archaeological information was recovered from this small scale investigation, although the engineers requirements were met. Of note was the type of materials used for the church wall foundations, which were not of coursed stone as might be expected.

The buttress at the junction of the walls is Victorian, and probably dates to the restoration of 1876.

No pre-Victorian finds were retrieved during the excavations.

5 SOURCES CONSULTED

Pevsnor, N. and Sherwood, J. Oxfordshire, Buildings of England

Sherwood, J. A Guide to the Churches of Oxfordshire

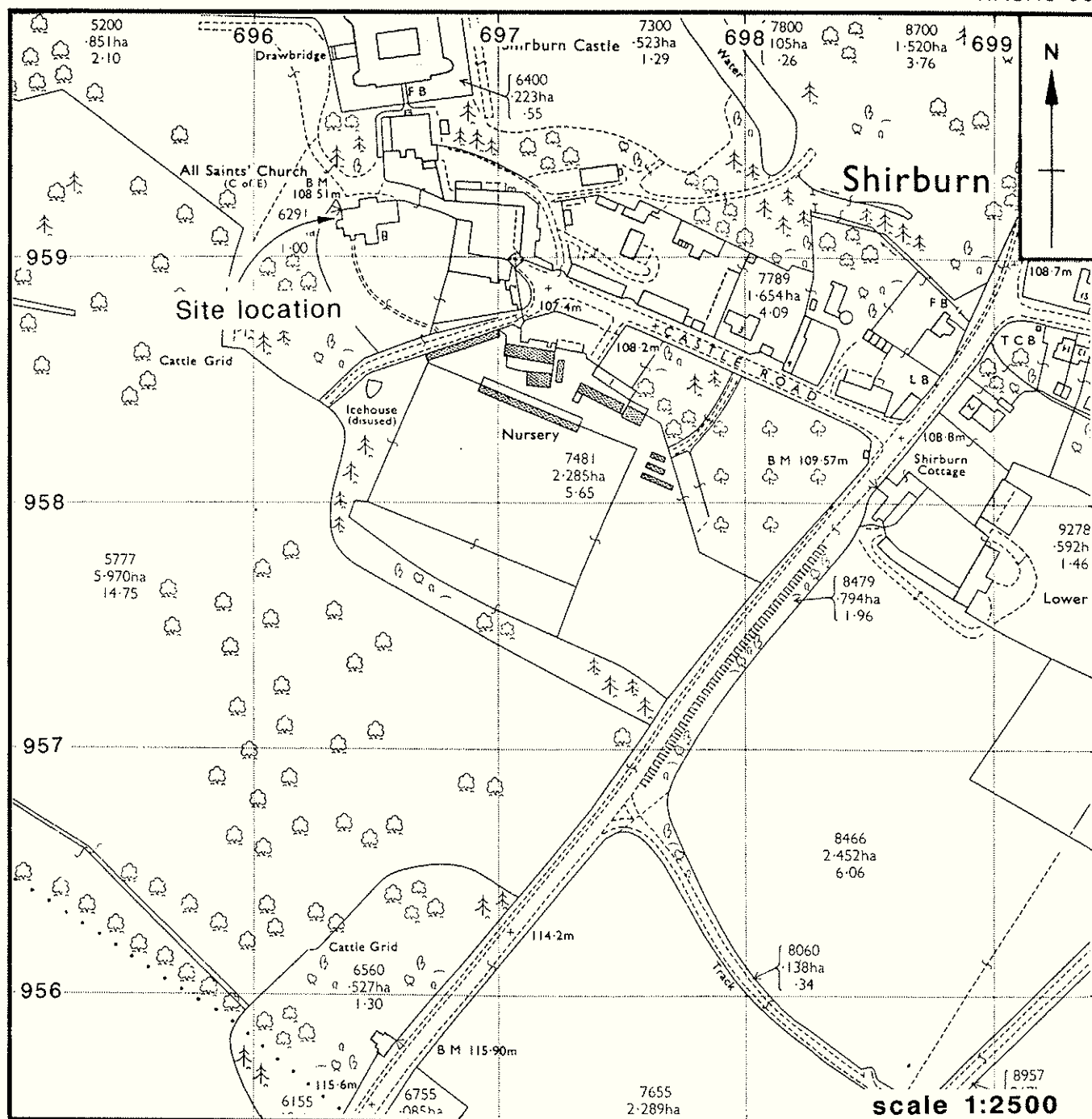
Victoria County History, Oxford - Vol. VIII (1964)

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Table of context information

CTX	TYPE	DEPTH	WIDTH	COMMENTS
1	layer	0.12 m	-	topsoil, grey-brown clay loam and moss
2	layer	0.53 m	-	layer containing frequent flint (20%), tile, brick and some willow pattern china - construction or restoration debris
3	structure	0.48 m	0.98 m	foundation of Victorian buttress 4, mixture of mortar, sand, flint and gravel - compacted
4	structure	-	0.70 m	Victorian brick buttress at junction of N aisle wall and N tower wall
5	cut	-	-	construction cut for footing 4 - cut not observed in trial trench but must be represented by the interface between 2 and 3
6	layer	-	-	unexcavated subsoil
7	structure	-	-	west wall of N aisle
8	structure	0.35 m+	-	footing below N wall of the tower, same build as 10
9	structure	-	-	N wall of tower
10	structure	0.53 m	-	footing below N aisle wall, same build as 8
11	drain	-	0.12 m	vertical downpipe against N wall of the tower
12	cut	0.30 m	0.25 m+	soakaway for drain 11



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Figure 1

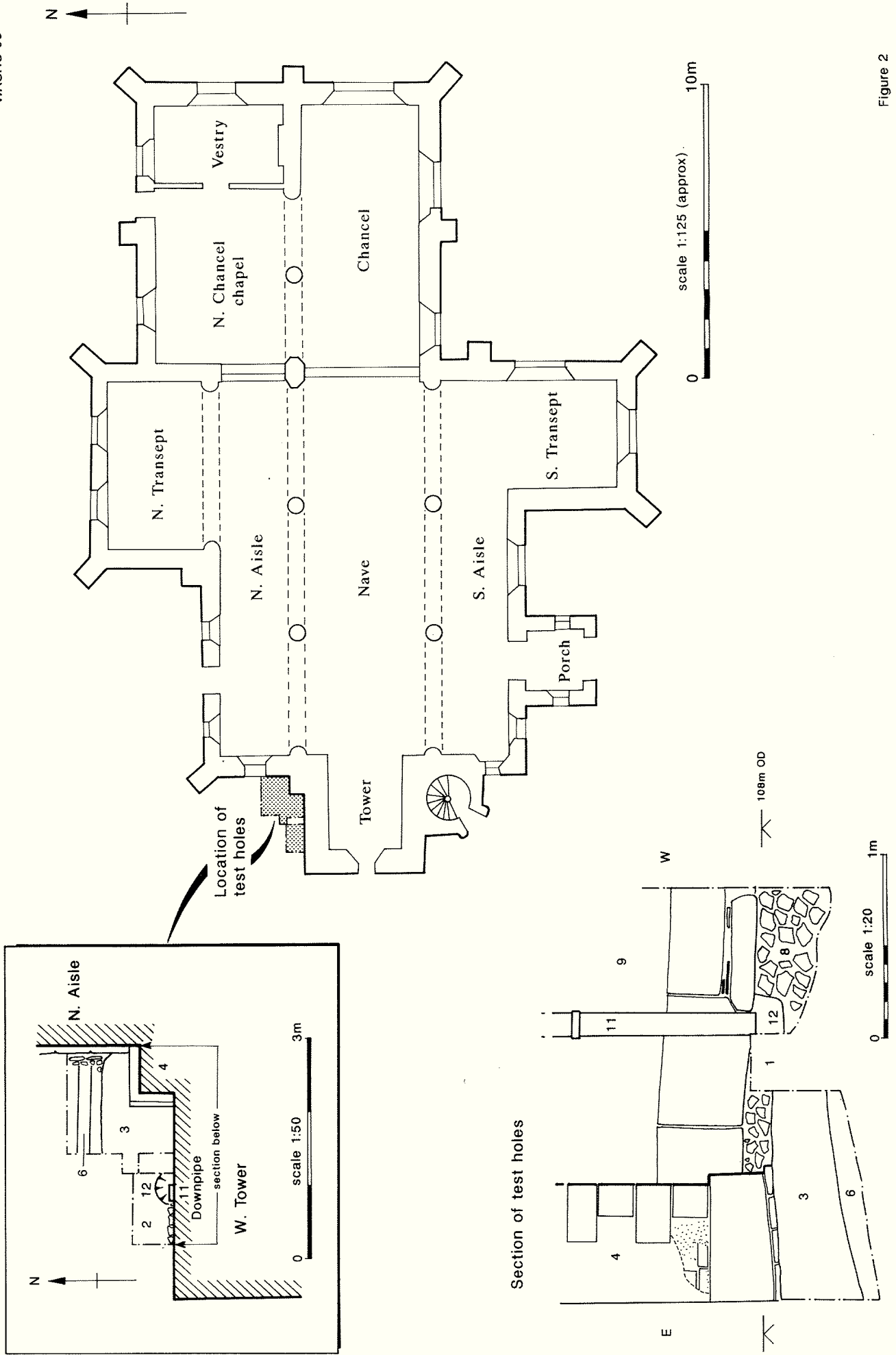


Figure 2



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