

St Laurence Church South Hinksey Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Church of St Laurence, South Hinksey, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front cover: St Laurence Church

SUMMARY

In January 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Laurence, South Hinksey, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 509 039). The work was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council in advance of the construction of a new toilet block, storeroom and associated service trenches. The watching brief revealed deposits of earlier churchyard soil and three 19th-century inhumations. No evidence for any earlier phases of the church's construction was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In January 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Laurence, South Hinksey, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 509 039). The work was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council in advance of the construction of a toilet block and storeroom on the north side of the church and the excavation of a new drainage trench (Fig. 2).
- 1.1.2 A project design was agreed between OA and the PCC prior to the commencement of works.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of South Hinksey lies approximately 1 km south of Oxford (Fig. 1). The Church is located on the southern edge of the village and is sited on a gentle north-east facing slope at approximately 58 m above OD. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay over Kelloways beds (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 236)

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 South Hinksey is first mentioned as a separate village in 1316, when the abbot of Abingdon Abbey was returned as lord of North Hinksey and South Hinksey. At the Dissolution South Hinksey came to the Crown.
- 1.3.2 The church of St Lawrence consists of a chancel 5.1 m square, a nave measuring 8.03 m by 5.35 m, west tower 3.89 m square, and a north porch.
- 1.3.3 The nave and chancel appear to have been built early in the 13th century. In the 14th century a window was inserted in the north of the nave, the west tower was added in the following century. The chancel was largely reconstructed in the 18th-century including the replacement of the windows in the east, north and south walls. The 13th century chancel arch has survived. The church has been restored and the timber north porch is modern.

- 1.3.4 The nave has a 14th-century window in the north wall and the north doorway probably dates to the 13th century. The first and third windows of the south wall are simple 13th-century lancets while the second window is of modern design. The 15th century tower is three stages high, with a plain moulded parapet, and a square turret staircase rising to the base of the belfry on the north side. It contains three bells.
- 1.3.5 The font is of the 13th century, and has a circular bowl tapering slightly to the base, which is moulded and rests on a square plinth.
- 1.3.6 In the churchyard, to the north of the nave, are the base and three steps of a stone cross.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of any groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken as a continuous archaeological presence during those works that were likely to impinge or damage any potential archaeological deposits or features.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of any excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2, Plan of works and Fig. 3, Site plan) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 3, Sections). All excavations, any features and any recorded sections were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

West of the porch

- 3.1.1 This consisted of an excavation 2.4 m long by 1.7 m wide located adjacent to the porch (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). This was excavated to a depth of up to 1.2 m below the current ground level.

- 3.1.2 The undisturbed natural, a red-brown silt clay (3) was encountered at a depth of 0.8 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This was overlaid by a 0.5 m deep layer of light grey-brown silt clay (2). This contained fragments of 18th and 19th-century clay pipe stems and probably represents a layer of churchyard soil.
- 3.1.3 Cutting this deposit was a rectangular east-west aligned grave cut (7). This contained the skeleton of an adult male (9) and iron coffin fittings suggesting that it probably dates to the 18th or 19th-century. The northern side of this grave cut was truncated by a later grave cut (5). This measured 1.9 m long by 0.45 m wide. This contained the skeleton of an adult female aged 45 plus (6) who showed evidence of severe curvature of the spine (Scoliosis). A number of iron coffin handles and gilt dome head nails were also recovered suggesting that the burial dates to the 18th or 19th centuries. The grave had been backfilled with a grey-brown silt clay (4). Cut into the western part of this deposit was a 0.7 m wide vertical-sided cut filled with a grey-brown clay silt (12) and redeposited bones. Its shape suggests that it represents another probable grave cut.
- 3.1.4 On the northern edge of the excavation a vertical-sided flat bottomed cut (11) was observed in the section also cutting layer 2. This was filled by a dark grey-brown clay silt (10), measured 0.7 m deep and was over 1.5 m in length. Its shape and alignment suggests that it was also a grave cut.
- 3.1.5 Sealing fills 10 and 12 was a 0.3 m deep layer of dark brown silt loam (1), the present day churchyard soil.

East of the porch

- 3.1.6 This consisted of an excavation also 2.4 m long by 1.7 m wide located adjacent to the porch and a service trench leading to an access chamber adjacent to the churchyard boundary wall (Fig: 2 and Fig. 3). This was excavated to a depth of up to 1.25 m below the current ground level in the area next to the porch deepening to 2.5 m below ground level during the excavation of the access chamber.
- 3.1.7 Within the area next to the porch, the natural (3) was encountered at a depth of 0.8 m below ground level (Fig. 3, Section 2). This was overlaid with a 0.5 m deep layer of light grey-brown clay silt, a continuation of the earlier churchyard soil (2). Cutting this deposit was a vertical sided cut (14), in excess of 0.9 m deep and over 1.6 m long. This feature was east-west aligned with straight edges indicative of a grave cut and was filled by a grey-brown silt clay (15). Sealing this was a 0.4 m deep layer of dark brown silt loam, a continuation of the present day churchyard soil (1).

Service trenching

- 3.1.8 The excavations for the access chamber measured 1 m by 1.3 m and were dug to a depth of 2.5 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 3). The natural, 3, was encountered at a depth of 1.2 m below the level of the current churchyard. This was overlaid by a continuation of the earlier churchyard soil (2), 0.8 m deep. Overlying

this was a 0.35 m layer of silt loam (1), a continuation of the present day churchyard soil. No inhumations were encountered during this phase of work.

3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 Dating evidence consisting of clay pipe stems dating to the 18th and 19th centuries was recovered from layer 2. Fragments of tile were observed within layers 1 and 2 but the fragments were considered to be undiagnostic and were not retained. Coffin fittings were encountered within grave cuts 5 and 7 but were re-interred within their respective burials. No other finds were encountered.

3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The watching brief showed that the areas adjacent to the porch within the area of the proposed storeroom had been used for a succession of inhumations. The coffin furniture recovered from the earliest of these graves suggests a date range of between the 18th and 19th centuries. The later graves post-date this. The closeness of the burials may possibly represent a family plot. The other grave cuts observed both within this area and the area east of the porch had also been cut from the same level suggesting a similar date. All the burials were cut through the layer of earlier churchyard soil (2) which produced finds suggesting an 18th to 19th century date. The fragments of tile recovered from layers 1 and 2 probably originate from original construction of the church or more likely from the reroofing of the church during the 18th-century.
- 4.1.2 No evidence was observed for any phases of church construction predating the standing structure.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.3 m	-	Topsoil and turf, present day churchyard soil	Tile	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	0.5 m	-	Earlier churchyard soil	Tile, clay pipe stem	C18th/ C19th
3	Layer	> 1.5 m	-	Natural, probable alluvial deposit	-	-
4	Fill	0.9 m	0.75 m	Grave fill	-	C18th/ C19th
5	Cut	0.9 m	0.75 m	Grave cut	-	C18th/ C19th
6	Skeleton	-	-	Articulated adult skeleton	Coffin fittings	C18th/ C19th
7	Cut	1 m	0.7 m	Grave cut	-	C18th/ C19th
8	Fill	1 m	0.7 m	Grave fill	-	C18th/ C19th
9	Skeleton	> 0.4 m		Articulated adult skeleton	Coffin fittings	C18th/ C19th
10	Fill	0.7 m	-	Grave fill	-	C19th ?
11	Cut	0.7 m	-	Grave cut	-	C19th ?
12	Fill	0.65 m	0.8 m	Grave fill	-	C18th/ C19th
13	Cut	0.65 m	0.8 m	Grave cut	-	C18th/ C19th
14	Cut	> 0.9 m	> 0.5 m	Grave cut	-	C18th/ C19th
15	Fill	> 0.9 m	> 0.5 m	Grave fill	-	C18th/ C19th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Laurence's Church, South Hinksey, Oxfordshire

Site code: SHSTLC 09

Grid reference: SP 509 039

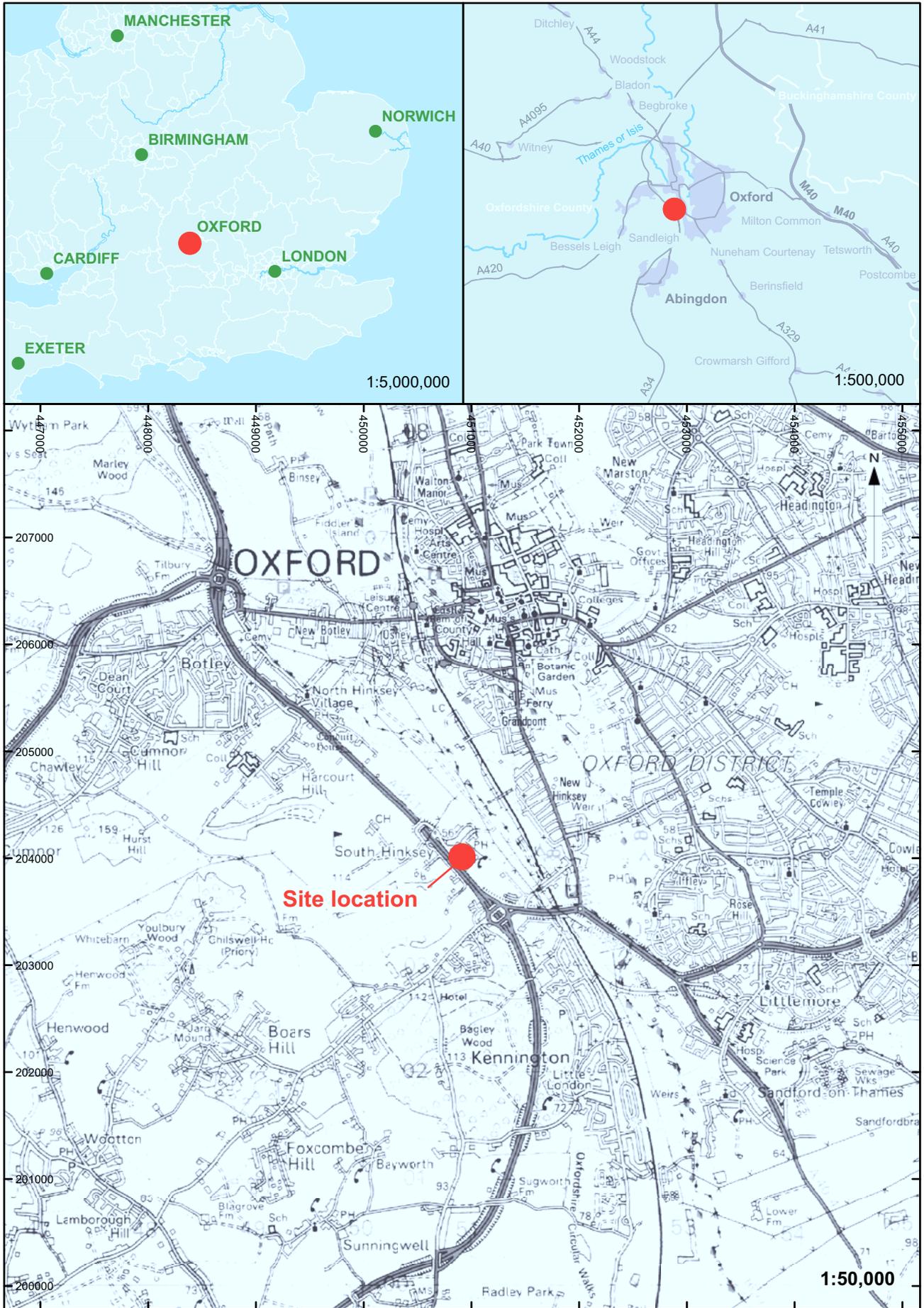
Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of foundations and new drainage trenches

Date and duration of project: 8th to 21st January 2009, 3 site visits

Area of site: 300 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief exposed evidence of 5 18th or 19th century burials. No evidence of any earlier phases of the churches construction was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course under the following accession number :OXCMS:2009.6

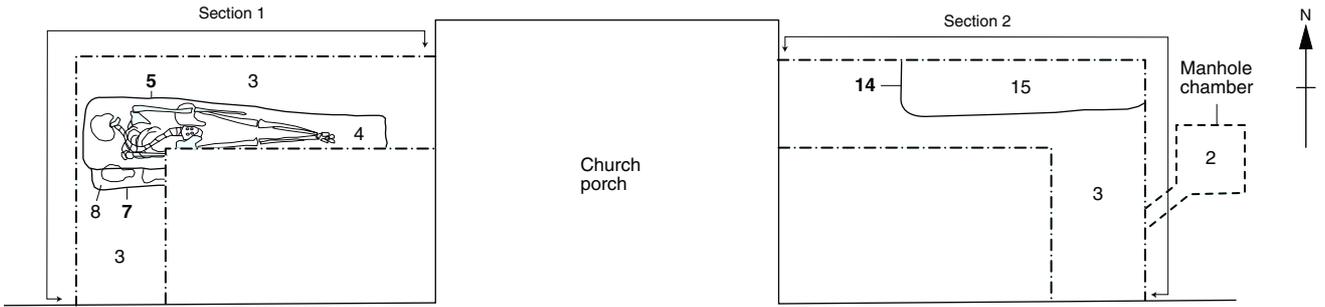


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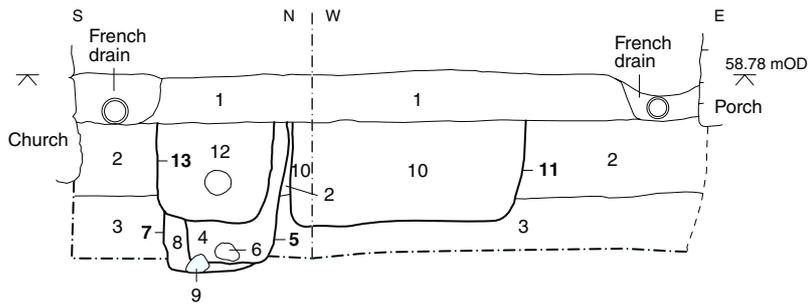
Figure 1: Site location



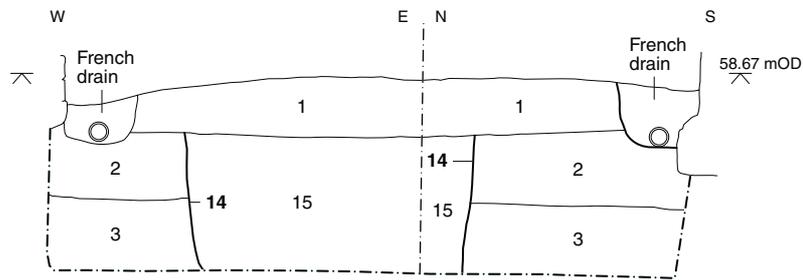
Figure 2: Plan of works



Section 1



Section 2



Section 3

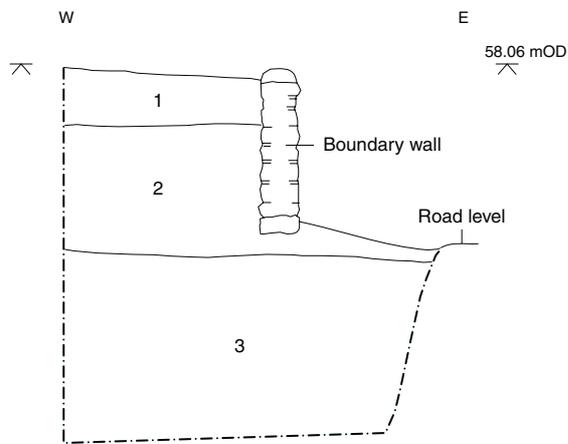


Figure 3: Site plan and sections



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