

St Mary-le-More Wallingford Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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1	James Mumford Project Officer	Andrew Norton Senior Project Manager	Edward Biddulph Senior Project Manager	

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263800

e: oasouth@thehumanjourney.net

f: +44 (0) 1865 793496

w: oasouth.thehumanjourney.net

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Church of St Mary-le-More, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

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Written by James Mumford

Illustrated by Mark Gridley

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Summary

From June to December 2009 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary-le-More, Wallingford, Oxford (NGR SU 6071 8933). The work was commissioned by JBKS Architects and the St Mary's Renewal Campaign in advance of the installation of new underfloor heating. The watching brief revealed the south wall of the medieval church, seven internal brick lined vaults and a late 19th-century heating system. An eighth vault and part of a boundary wall was revealed in works to the north of the church.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 From June 2009 to December 2009 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary-Le-More, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by JBKS Architects and the St Mary's Renewal Campaign in advance of the installation of new underfloor heating.
- 1.1.2 All archaeological work followed an archaeological recording specification set by Julian Munby, the Oxfordshire Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (Oxford Diocese 2008).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on alluvium over valley gravels (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet No 254) at 49 m above Ordnance Datum (OD). The site is situated in the centre of the town, immediately south of the town hall in the market place.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the specification for the project (Oxford Diocese 2008) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 St Mary-le-More Church existed by 1077-1093 when half the church was given to the abbey of St Albans by Neil Daubeney and his wife, Amice. Before 1160 the church had passed to the priory of the Holy Trinity (a cell of St Albans), from which it passed to the crown following the dissolution of the priory in 1526. It remained with the crown until 1853, apart from a brief period when it was granted to Cardinal Wolsey for the benefit of Cardinal College, Oxford. Patronage was transferred to the Bishop of Oxford.
- 1.3.3 The west tower and chancel walls are the only parts of the church dating from the medieval period. The tower foundations are from the 14th century or earlier, although the upper part was rebuilt in 1653 to repair damage caused by a thunderstorm in the same year. The rest of the church was completely rebuilt in 1854, when the chancel was shortened to extend the nave.
- 1.3.4 Excavations by Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1995 exposed the remains of the medieval south wall of the church within the present south aisle. Elsewhere in the church the layer of dust, wood chippings and rubble below the floorboards was not removed and further remains of the earlier building may have remained concealed below. The excavations also found a brick burial vault in the nave, situated close to the original extent of the chancel. It was not explored in detail (OAU 1995).

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA's thanks are extended to Jill Ewbank, of JBKS Architects, and Mavis Bolton, of the St Mary's Renewal Campaign, for their help and assistance during the work. Thanks are also extended to Julian Munby of Oxford Archaeology and Brian Waller and Barry Hissey of C Wood and Son (Luton) Ltd.



2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The principal aims of the work were to:

- (i) Record the location of the sub-floor and sleeper walls following the removal of pews and the boarded platforms below them.
- (ii) Record medieval or post-medieval floor surfaces, monuments, burials and burial vaults, and elements of earlier fabric exposed by clearance below the finished floor level.
- (iii) To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- (iv) To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Following the removal of the pews by external contractors, the exposed deposits were cleaned and examined by an archaeologist for any significant remains. Any areas above 50.13 m OD were investigated to characterise the nature of the deposits. In principle any significant deposits would be further reduced by hand, and less significant deposits removed by the principal contractor.

2.2.2 Deeper excavations in advance of new drainage and services were also monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist.

2.2.3 During the course of the work the following guidance was followed:

- (v) Human bone was not to be removed from the church
- (vi) Where burial vaults were found they were not opened
- (vii) Where they were found open, observed features were recorded but not disturbed

2.2.4 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using digital photography and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the OAU Fieldwork Manual (Wilkinson 1992).



3 RESULTS

3.1 Archaeological deposits

The medieval church

- 3.1.1 Following the removal of the pews, flooring and floor beams the earliest deposit revealed was the south wall of the medieval church (101), previously seen in the 1995 watching brief. The wall was west-east aligned and located within the south aisle (Fig. 2; Plates 1 and 2) and survived to a height of 49.86 m OD. Only the upper course of the wall was exposed, which was 0.8 m wide and over 15 m long. The wall was constructed from faced limestone blocks and flint fragments, measuring 0.3 m by 0.2 m by 0.2 m. The wall was seen to return to the north in the 1995 watching brief but excavation was not as deep during the more recent works and the return was not seen. The medieval wall was abutted by a rubbly brown, silty clay loam levelling deposit (107). The deposit contained 19th-century glass and earlier redeposited pottery. A testpit to the north-west of wall 101 demonstrated that 107 was at least 0.6 m thick.

19th-century brick built vaults

- 3.1.2 Church wall 101 was abutted by a probable burial vault on its north side. A rectangular cut (108) measuring 2.5 m long by 1.5 m wide was filled with a loose grey brown silty sand (109). This sand was thought to overlie a collapsed burial vault, which had been filled in during the 19th-century renovations.
- 3.1.3 An intact vault was revealed within the choir vestry. The top of the vault measured 2.70 m long by 1.17 m wide and was constructed from a double skin of red bricks, each measuring 0.23 m x 0.11 m x 0.08 m. The vault was overlain by a limestone gravestone (100; Plate 3) measuring 1.80 m x 0.95 m x 0.10 m. The stone was inscribed:

SACRED
to the memory of
Sarah
The wife of William B. Sheen
Solicitor of this Place
who died Jan. 30th 1833
Aged 49
Also of the said
William Howell Sheen
who died Nov: 1835
Aged 56

- 3.1.4 Two infilled brick-lined vaults (121) were revealed below the chancel floor and the foundations of the north chancel wall (Fig. 2; Plate 4). The tops of both vaults had collapsed and the structures had been backfilled with rubble and levelled for the laying the timber floor supports. The eastern vault was aligned north to south and measured 2.5 m x 2 m. The western vault was aligned west to east and measured 2 m x 1.75 m; its western end had been rebuilt during the construction of the heating duct 106 (see below). Both structures were constructed of a single skin of bricks, each measuring 0.22m x 0.11 m x 0.07 m. Charnel bones were observed in the backfill of the western vault, presumably a result of the disturbance of a burial during the construction of the 19th-century heating duct.



- 3.1.5 The most ornate vault (105) was previously observed in the 1995 watching brief (Fig. 2; Plate 5). It comprised a red brick vault measuring over 2 m by 2 m, but possibly truncated by later heating ducts, with a flight of five brick built steps measuring 1 m long, 0.25 m wide and 0.2 m high. A roughly dressed limestone slab blocked the entrance to the vault and bore the inscription: W, VII, NT, probably a mason's mark (Plate 6).
- 3.1.6 A rectangular west-east aligned, brick vault (122) was located in the west end of the north aisle. The structure was trench built and measured 1.95 m x 0.75 m x 0.94 m with a low barrel vaulted top (Fig. 2; Plate 7). The remains of a coffin were present within the vault, which were overlain by the curved wooden frame used to construct the vault's roof (Plate 8).
- 3.1.7 Two trenches were excavated through the floor of the Rector's Office to enable column supports to be constructed. The collapsed east end of a brick vault (118) was revealed within the southern trench; the vault was backfilled by loose brick rubble (Fig. 2; Plate 9).
- 3.1.8 A vault (124) was revealed outside the north porch of the church during the construction of a wheel chair ramp (Fig. 2; Plate 10). The vault was intact and measured over 2.30 m long and 1.20 m wide. It was constructed from red bricks measuring 0.22 m x 0.11 m x 0.07 m in a yellowish sandy mortar bond. The vault was overlain by a 0.45 m thick buried graveyard soil and the stone paving of the existing church path.

19th-century heating ducts

- 3.1.9 Three east-west aligned brick lined heating ducts (102-104) were revealed within the centre of the church (Fig. 2; Plate 11). The ducts connected to a north-south aligned duct (106), which led from the boiler room. The structures were over 7 m long and 1.2 m wide, and were constructed from two brick walls, each four courses high and overlain by a course of peg tiles. The bricks measured 0.22 m by 0.08 m by 0.07 m and the base of each duct was constructed from limestone slabs. Where ducts 104 and 106 joined, an upper stone floor was inserted, presumably to aid circulation of the warm air (Plate 12).

Other deposits

- 3.1.10 A north-south aligned wall foundation was revealed within an excavation for a service trench to the east of the pulpit. The foundation (110) was constructed from rough limestone blocks and measured 0.7 m wide and over 0.2 m deep (Fig. 2; Plate 13). It is possible that the wall formed part of the medieval church, but the absence of flint and its location directly beneath the vestry door makes a 19th-century date more likely. The structure probably formed a foundation for the vestry wall.
- 3.1.11 In the north west corner of the church was a flint pebble hardcore base (123) for the construction of the present staircase. The spread measured 4m x 2 m (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.12 A service trench was excavated around the north side of the church. The trench was 0.40 m wide and 0.60 m in depth and was cut through a 0.45 m thick buried soil (112; Fig. 2). This soil had been cut by a construction trench (114) for an old boundary wall (113), the trench measured 0.45 m wide and 0.50 m deep and the wall footing was constructed of chalk fragments in a light brown clay bond (Plate 14). Only the top of the wall foundation was observed and it was overlain by a light brown silty sand backfill (115). The deposits were overlain by the existing stone surface of the churchyard (111).



3.2 Finds summary

- 3.2.1 John Cotter (OA) identified the pottery and ceramic building material recovered from the site, which included a fragment of a 13th- to 15th-century Brill/Boarstall ware jug base from levelling layer 107, and seven fragments of late medieval or post-medieval peg tiles that were used to level up the top course of the 19th-century heating ducts (101).
- 3.2.2 Ian Scott (OA) identified an 18th- to 19th-century moulded glass bottle recovered from levelling layer 107.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.



4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The relatively shallow depth of the groundworks meant that no new sections of the medieval church were observed. A rubbly levelling deposit, at least 0.6 m thick, was observed throughout the church and either obscured medieval floors and walls or filled voids following the removal of medieval structures. A 15 m section of the south wall of the medieval church was seen, but no new light could be shed on the results of the 1995 watching brief.
- 4.1.2 A total of seven brick-built vaults were revealed within the church, and one vault was revealed outside the church's north entrance. The vaults' roofs were all barrel shaped but the vaults varied in size from single shaft graves, to sizeable structures capable of containing several individuals. A stairway led to the base of vault 105, and it is feasible that the chamber was used for several generations. As ground reduction varied within the church it is possible that vaults may survive elsewhere.
- 4.1.3 It is unclear whether the vaults pre-dated the deposition of levelling layer 107, but vault 100, the resting place of Sarah and William Sheen, was constructed in 1833 and the brick vaults and levelling layer are likely to be broadly contemporary.
- 4.1.4 The heating ducts were cut through the levelling deposits and truncated two of the brick vaults. The ducts were constructed so that a double shaft fed the three central ducts of the heating system. Presumably if only a single shaft fed the three ducts the system would have been less efficient.
- 4.1.5 A small section of an undated boundary wall was revealed within the northern churchyard, and it is likely that the church boundary was altered to match the existing road layout.



APPENDIX A. CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Comments
100	Slab	0.1	0.94	1.8	Grave marker
101	Structure		0.8	15	South wall of medieval church
102	Structure		1.2	7	19th Century heating duct
103	Structure		1.2	7	19th Century heating duct
104	Structure		1.2	7	19th Century heating duct
105	Structure	2	1	2.4	Brick vault
106	Structure		1.2	7	19th Century heating duct
107	Layer	0.6			Construction layer
108	Cut		1.5	2.5	Vault/Grave cut
109	Fill		0.3	0.7	Fill of 108
110	Structure				Foundation wall
111	Layer	0.15			Stone surface in front of church
112	Layer	0.45			Old graveyard soil
113	Structure		0.6		Foundation of churchyard wall
114	Cut	0.5	0.45	0.4	Construction trench
115	Fill				Backfill of trench 114
116	Cut	0.4	1.1	1.3	Test pit
117	Layer				Construction layer in church
118	Structure	0.4	0.8	0.9	Brick vault
119	Fill				Backfill of vault
120	Cut	0.3	0.9	0.9	Test pit
121	Structure		0.8		Brick divider wall of vault
122	Structure	0.94	0.75	1.95	Brick vault
123	Layer				Hardcore floor make up
124	Structure	0.25	1.2	2.3	Brick vault



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet No 254, 1:50,000

OAU, 1995 Church of St Mary-Le-More, Wallingford, Oxfordshire Archaeological Watching Brief, unpublished client report

Oxford Diocese, 2008 St Mary Le More Church, Wallingford, (Archdeaconry of Berkshire: Deanery of Wallingford), Archaeological Recording Specification, unpublished client report

Wilkinson, D (ed.), 1992 OAU Fieldwork Manual, unpublished report



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

- Site name:** Church of St Mary-le-More, Wallingford, Oxfordshire
- Site code:** WALMOM 09
- Grid reference:** NGR SU 6071 8933
- Type:** Watching Brief
- Date and duration:** 8/6/2009 to 2/12/2009 - a total of 8 site visits were made during the course of the ground works.
- Area of site:** 28.5 m x 18 m
- Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed the south wall of the medieval church, brick lined vaults and a 19th-century church heating system.
- 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 2009.49



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Figure 1: Site location

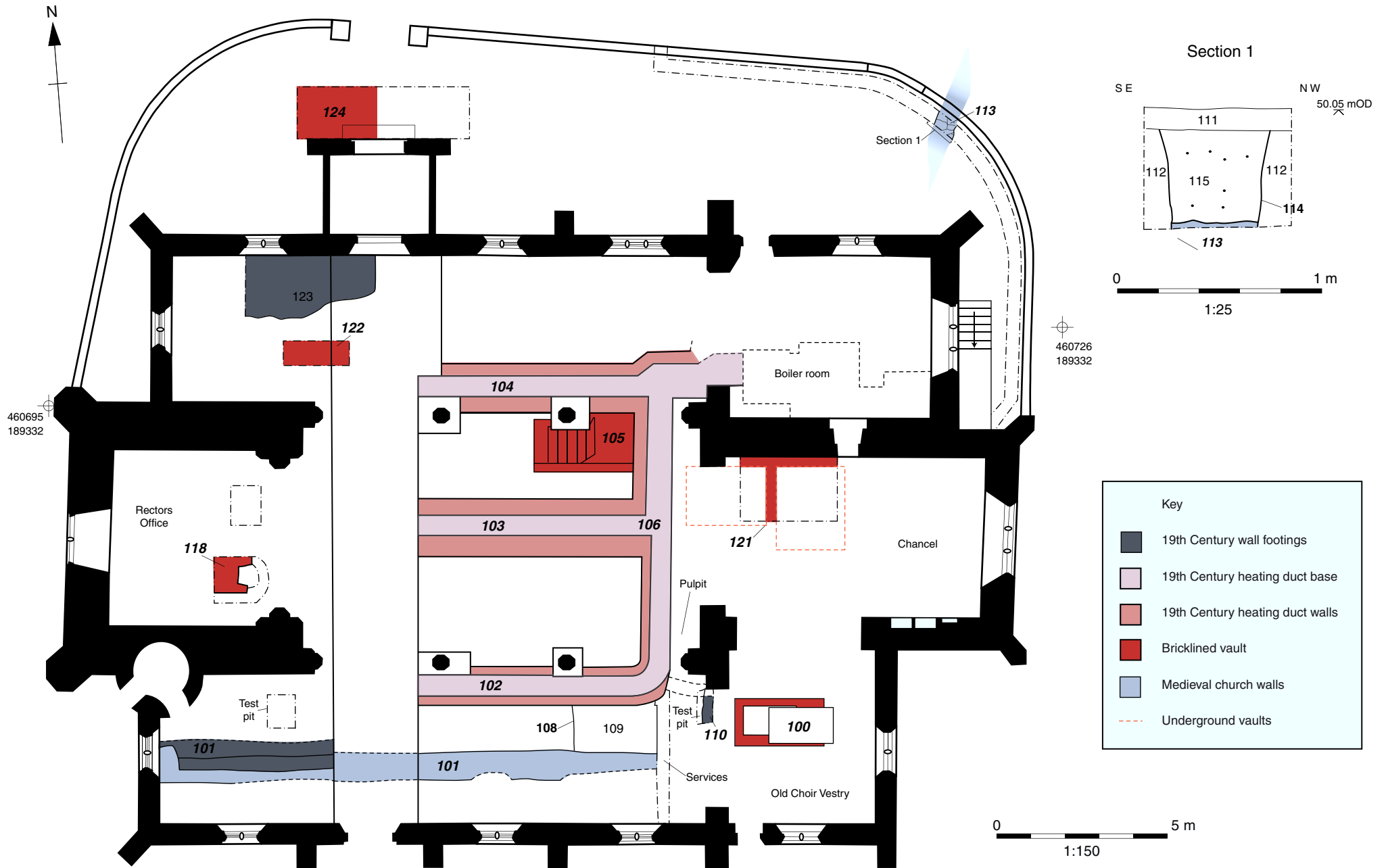


Figure 2: Site plan showing archaeological features and Section 1



Plate 1: Medieval church wall 101, western section looking south

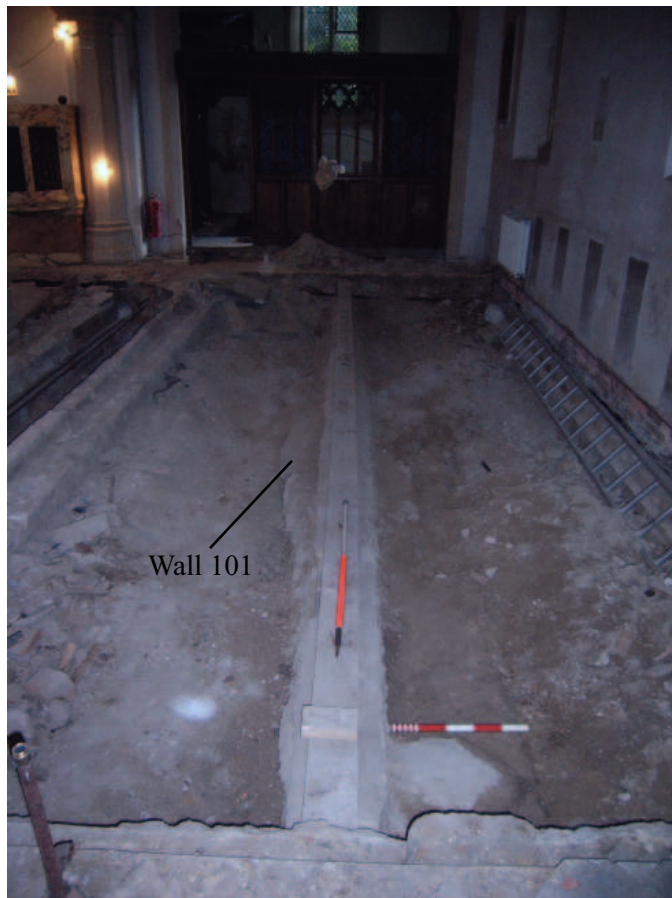


Plate 2: Medieval church wall 101, looking east



Plate 3: Grave marker 100



Plate 4: Vault 121, looking north



Plate 5: Brick vault 105, looking north-east



Plate 6: Brick vault 105 Mason's mark



Plate 7: Brick vault 122, looking south



Plate 8: Brick vault 122, internal view



Plate 9: Brick vault 118, looking west



Plate 10: Brick vault 124, looking west



Plate 11: Brick heating duct 102, looking east



Plate 12: Brick heating duct 106, looking west



Plate 13: Vestry wall foundation 110, looking west



Plate 14: Wall footing 113, looking south



OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Maugeio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oamed@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>

Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA



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