

St Peter's Church Brackley Northamptonshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

12th November 2002

Client Name:

Parochial Church Council for St Peter's Church

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1529

NGR: SP 5916 3730

Client Name: Parochial Church Council for St Peter's Church

Client Ref No:

Document Title: St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northants

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: NGR SP 5916 3730
Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 1529
Site Code: BRPETE 02
Invoice Code: BRPETEWB
Receiving Museum: No museum currently available
Museum Accession No: n/a

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Date: 29th October 2002

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Document File Location U:/OAU/wbREPORTS/Northamptonshire/BRPETE.doc
Graphics File Location Server 10(W):/OAUpubs 1/A to H *BRPETEWB*St
Peters Church Brackley *PL*24.10.02
Illustrated by Peter Lorimer

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St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northants

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In October 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northants (NGR SP 5916 3730). The work was commissioned by the Building Committee for St Peters (for the Parochial Church Council) in respect of the excavation of a trench for a new gas pipe. The watching brief revealed only a homogenous 'graveyard' soil, no archaeological features or deposits and no human remains were uncovered or disturbed by the groundwork.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In October 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northants (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by the Building Committee of St Peters (for the Parochial Church Council) in respect of the excavation of trench through the churchyard for the installation of a new gas pipe.

1.1.2 A project brief was set by the Peterborough Diocesan Advisor (DAC ref.3516/3.a.8/28.08.02).

1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2002).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on inferior oolitic limestone at 115.6 m above OD. The site of the new gas trench is situated at the east end of the church.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2002) and is reproduced below.

1.3.2 Brackley lies on the south-west border of the county of Northamptonshire. The town is recorded in Domesday Book, when Earl Aubrey held of the King two hides in *Hasou* (Hawes), two in *Sigresham* (Syresham) and one in *Brachelai* (Brackley) with a church and mill (VCH I, 330). Domesday lists a population of 24 (six serfs, ten villeins and eight borders). The Old Town of Brackley, centred on the parish church of St Peter, corresponds with this settlement. The fabric of the church is predominantly 13th century and later, but limited Norman features survive, including a fine doorway preserved in the south wall of the south aisle. St Peter's churchyard was originally ovoid; this is generally considered to be an indicator of a pre-Norman origin. A southward extension to the cemetery was added in the 19th century.

1.3.3 The medieval town was laid out before 1173 along the old road from Northampton to Oxford, which forms the main street of the bypassed town (RCHM 1982, 21). The

impetus for the shift was probably provided by the castle, which lay at the south end of the new settlement. The town was separately represented in the Assizes by 1202, but its rent of £66 18s 4d in 1173 demonstrates its previous existence. Burgesses are mentioned in the mid-13th century, when the name Old Town was already used to describe the vicinity of St Peter's (Beresford 1967, 468-9).

- 1.3.4 Various finds of Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval dates have been made around St Peter's, especially during housing developments to the south and the east of the church. Some of these would appear to suggest that a high-status site lie in the immediate vicinity. A number of chance finds of mid to late Saxon artefacts have within both town and parish, unfortunately few of these have a secure provenance. Pottery of 12th-14th century date has been found in Old Town, including within the area of the cemetery expansion.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The trench was hand excavated along the proposed route from the boundary wall to the south-east corner of the church. The trench was around 20 m in length.
- 2.2.2 A plan was made of the line of the trench and a written and drawn record made of the stratigraphy exposed in the trench sides. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 A trench 0.3 m wide and 0.5 m deep was excavated for the gas pipe. The trench cut through a 0.12 m thick layer of dark grey-brown silty clay loam topsoil (1). This overlay a dark red-brown silty clay loam (2) that was at least 0.38 m thick, which represents the general graveyard soil. No grave cuts were visible within this layer nor at the base of the trench. No dis-articulated bones were noted in the course of the observations.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered from the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

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

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The results from the watching brief showed that the shallow depth of excavation for the trench had not disturbed any burials along its length or any other archaeological features. A layer of slightly mixed soil beneath the topsoil represents general graveyard soil.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 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 | 0.12 m | | | Topsoil | None |
| 2 | Layer | | | | Graveyard soil | None |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- OAU, 1993 St Peter's Church, Brackley. Archaeological Evaluation Report
- OAU, 1998 St Peter's Church Brackley. Archaeological Watching Brief Report
- Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).
- Beresford M W 1967, *New Towns of the Middle Ages*
- RCHM 1982, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton: Volume 4, Archaeological sites in South - West Northamptonshire*
- VCH I 1902, *The Victoria County History of Northamptonshire, Volume 1*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northants

Site code: BRPETE 02

Grid reference: NGR SP 5916 3730

Type of watching brief: Excavation of trench for new gas pipe.

Date and duration of project: One visit on the 16.10.02.

Area of site: A 0.3 m wide trench that was 0.5 m deep.

Summary of results: No archaeological features or deposits were uncovered or disturbed by the ground work.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES. No museum in Northamptonshire is currently available to receive the archive.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

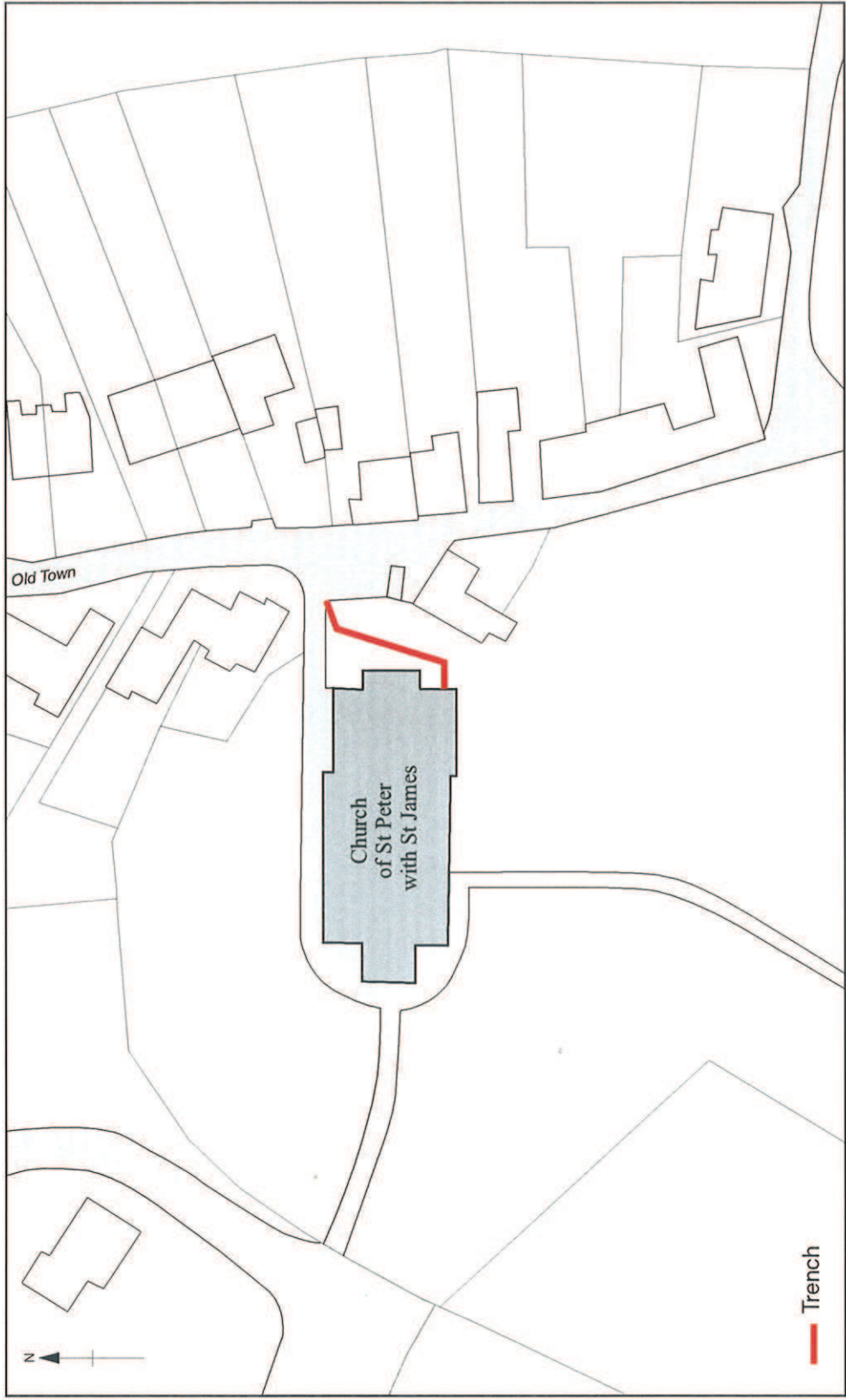


Figure 2: Site plan



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