

Edmund Waller Tomb St Mary and All Saints Beaconsfield Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Acanthus Clews Architects

**Edmund Waller Tomb,
St Mary and All Saints Church,
Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

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SUMMARY

On the 27th and 28th of September 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land at St Mary and All Saints Church, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 945 900). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clew Architects, in advance of conservation of the Edmund Waller tomb. The watching brief revealed that an old walnut tree previously occupying the perimeter of the site had caused some below ground disturbance, but that there had been an attempt to rectify this in the Victorian period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between 27th and 28th September 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the parish church of St Mary and All Saints in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 945 900) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Andrew Salter of Acanthus Clews Architects. The work was carried out during exploratory works on the tomb of Edmund Waller within an enclosure in the church yard.

1.1.2 During the works three trial pits were dug alongside the tomb to ascertain the level of below ground disturbance to the fabric of the tomb, caused by the growth and subsequent removal of an ancient Walnut tree that occupied the western edge of the tomb's enclosure.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is situated in the churchyard of the church of St Mary and All Saints, Beaconsfield (NGR: SU 945 900). The tomb lies to the southeast of the church within a rectangular enclosure surrounded by wrought iron railings enclosing the tomb, which is surrounded by limestone flags. The underlying geology is Glacial Sands and Gravel overlain by grave soil.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The present church was reconstructed largely by Woodyer in the mid-late 19th century (although wills of 1521 refer to the 'byldyng of the stepbull') Indeed little remains of the earlier edifice - a recess in the chancel north wall is of 16th century origin whilst the Edmund Waller Tomb must date to close to the man's death in 1687.

1.3.2 The tomb is constructed of white marble and dark grey carboniferous limestone. The tomb comprises a rectangular box-like tomb-chest constructed of slabs of white marble, sitting on a low stepped plinth of the same material (on brick foundations). The tomb-chest is 'draped' with carved dark grey limestone drapes at each face and the top.

Sitting on the table corners are four 'flaming' urns, and in the middle is a four sided needle-spire surmounting four carved skulls.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To record the extent, date, character, quality, significance and state of preservation of any archaeological remains within the areas of the site affected by the proposed works. In particular, to preserve by record features and deposits associated with the foundations of the tomb and unexpected human remains.

2.1.2 To make available the results of the watching brief.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The groundworks monitored consisted of the removal by hand of four flagstones, and the subsequent hand digging of the immediate underlying material to expose the foundations of the tomb.

2.2.2 A plan of the extent of the works and the location of the sections was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2). Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The extent of the site and the sections were photographed using 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* (OAU 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 Trial Pit 1 was located against the western elevation of the plinth and positioned centrally across its western length. The pit measured 1.4 m in length (N-S) and 0.8 m wide. The maximum excavated depth was 0.2 m. The pit revealed the foundations of the plinth to a depth of 5 courses. The bricks measured an average of 110 x 70 mm, though the average thickness could not be ascertained. The remainder of the trial pit contained a loose material comprised of soil, brick fragments and mortar which was clearly laid within the void left by walnut tree root cavity. The on-site conservator suggested a Victorian date for this consolidation deposit.

3.1.2 Trial Pit 2 was located against the southern elevation of the plinth towards the south east corner of the monument. Trial pit 2 measured 0.65 m in length (N-S) and 0.5 m wide. Pit 2 had a maximum depth of 0.12 m. This pit revealed similar deposits to those in Pit 1.

3.1.3 Trial Pit 3 was located immediately to the south west of Trial Pit 2. This pit measured 0.75 m in length (N-S) and 0.7 m wide. This pit had a maximum depth of 0.15 m. Within this pit similar deposits to those in Pits 1 and 2 were identified with

the possible addition of a N-S brick-built spur or buttress to the underlying brick vault.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 A small quantity of charnel was recovered during excavation but was immediately re-interred.

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 All the deposits encountered were consistent with the known history of the site. It is thought that the walnut tree, planted at the same time as the tomb was constructed, had caused some damage to the monument. After the removal of the tree some infilling of the root cavity had taken place (possibly in the 19th century) to consolidate the tomb structure.
- 4.1.2 The general condition of the below ground fabric of the monument was good, with very little sign of serious damage that would require reconstruction rather than conservation.
- 4.1.3 No satellite burials or other features were observed in any of the Trial Pits. The natural geology was not encountered during the watching brief.

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	0.2 m	-	Consolidated Backfilling	Charnel	19th Century
2	Struct	0.06 m	-	Limestone Flags	-	17th Century
3	Struct	>0.35	-	Brick Vault/Foundation	-	17th Century

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 1992 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

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

Pevsner, N, 1960 *The Buildings of England - Buckinghamshire*. Penguin

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Edmund Waller Tomb, St Mary and All Saints, Beaconsfield, Bucks

Site code: BEEWAS 05

Grid reference: SU 945 900

Type of watching brief: Monitoring of exploratory works around tomb

Date and duration of project: 2 visits 27th and 28th September 2005

Area of site: 225 m²

Summary of results: Brick Vault/Tomb foundation exposed - condition good.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service in due course.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

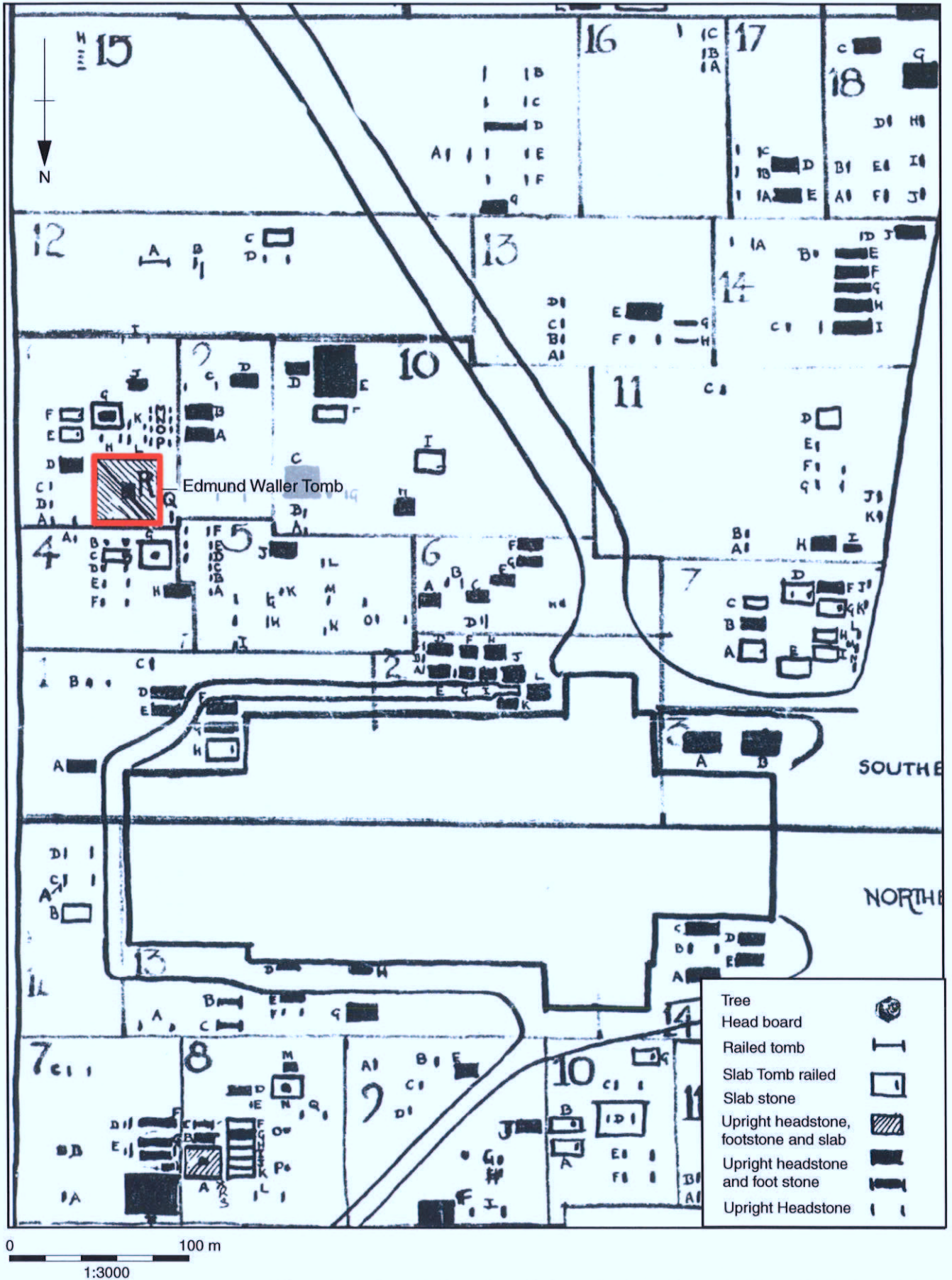
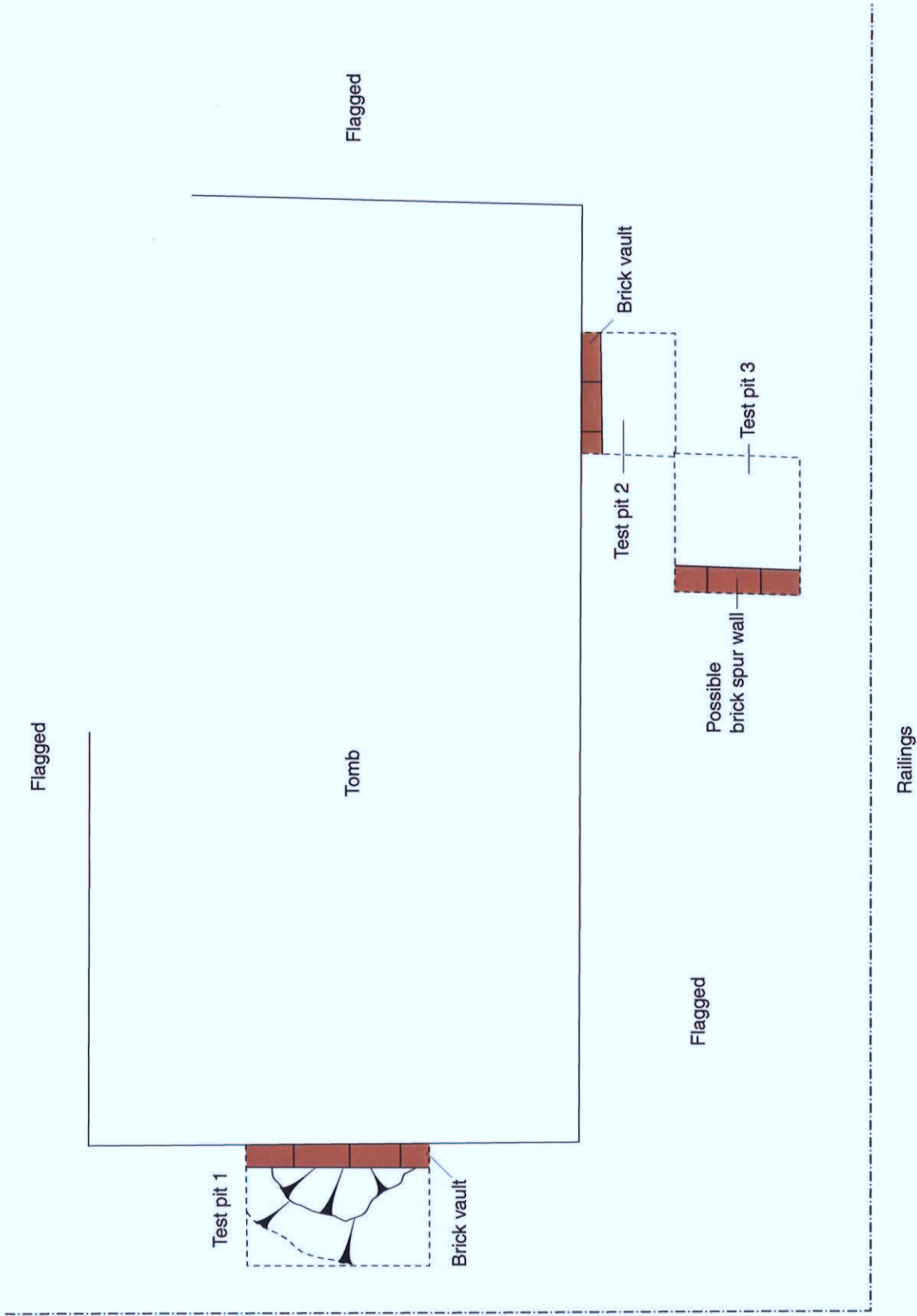
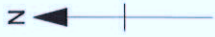


Figure 2: Plan of churchyard, showing location of Edmund Waller's Tomb



Not to scale

Figure 3: Plan showing location of Tomb and Trial pits



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