

# St Mary's Church Lower Heyford Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

October 2005

**Client: Montgomery Architects**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1

OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 2932

NGR: SP 485 248

**Client Name:** Montgomery Architects

**Client Ref No:**

**Document Title:** St Mary's Church, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire

**Document Type:** Watching Brief

**Issue Number:** 1

National Grid Reference: SP 485 248

Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 2932

Site Code: LHSMC 05

Invoice Code: LHSMCWB


Receiving Museum: TBC

Museum Accession No: TBC

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Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Oxfordshire OX\Cherwell CH\6070 St  
Mary's Church, Lower Heyford\wb.REP.doc  
Graphics File Location Servergo:/oaupubs 1\_1 thru Q\*LHSMCWB\*St Marys  
Church, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire\*cas\*11.10.05  
Illustrated by Elin

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# St Mary's Church, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

### CONTENTS

Summary .....	1
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Scope of work .....	1
1.2 Location, geology and topography .....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background .....	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology .....	2
2.1 Aims.....	2
2.2 Methodology.....	2
3 Results.....	2
3.1 Description of deposits .....	2
3.2 Finds.....	3
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains.....	3
4 Discussion and Conclusions .....	3
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory.....	4
Appendix 2 Bibliography and References.....	4
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details .....	4

### LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location  
Fig. 2 Plan showing area of watching brief and section 1

## SUMMARY

*On October 6th 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 485 248). The work was commissioned by Montgomery Architects in advance of the excavation of a pipe duct within the church. The watching brief revealed deposits of construction debris associated with the 1848 and 1867 renovations of the church but no earlier deposits.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On October 6th 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 485 248). The work was commissioned by Montgomery Architects in respect of the proposed excavation of a pipe duct within the church.
- 1.1.2 A project design was agreed with Julian Munby, the Archaeological Consultant for the Diocesan Archaeological Committee (DAC), on behalf of the Church Commissioners.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The church is sited on the northern edge of the village of Lower Heyford within the valley of the River Cherwell. The churchyard runs up to the southern bank of the Oxford Canal (Fig. 1). The church occupies an area of approximately 0.4 hectares and lies at approximately 68 m above OD. The underlying geology is alluvium overlying Terrace deposits (British Geological Survey Sheet 218).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the watching brief has been prepared from the official history of the church and an abridged version is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The first church on the site was consecrated by the Anglo-Saxon Bishop Wulfin of Dorchester (1053 - 1067), probably about the time of the Norman Conquest. By 1338, the chancel was reported to be in disrepair leading to the church being almost completely rebuilt in the 14th century, probably before 1350.
- 1.3.3 By the 15th century the church was again being remodelled, with the aisle walls being raised and a clerestorey added in the perpendicular style. The tower, porch, the rood screen and the stair-turret also date to this period.
- 1.3.4 In 1533 Corpus Christi College bought the village, acquiring the "living" allowing the college to chose and support the Rectors.

- 1.3.5 In 1739 the floor was described as "paving, uneven and broken", while the churchwardens were reprimanded for allowing the church to fall into a general state of disrepair. The porch was described as in danger of falling down, the whole building overrun with ivy and even the Bible "imperfect and out of binding".
- 1.3.6 By the 19th century the church was again perceived as being in need of renovation and work was carried out in 1848 by H.J. Underwood, and in 1867 by C. Buckeridge. These works included the installation of the current stone slab and tile flooring.
- 1.3.7 In February 1941 a central heating boiler house was excavated on the north side of the church. During this work a coin from the period of Constantine the Great (307AD to 337AD) was recovered.

## **2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims**

- 2.1.1 To identify 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 remains that might be disturbed or destroyed during the development.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### **2.2 Methodology**

- 2.2.1 The work was completed under archaeological supervision and comprised the lifting of the existing stone slab floor and the excavation of a 0.15 m wide by 0.2 m deep trench across the northern doorway.
- 2.2.2 The excavations were planned at a scale of 1:50 and a sample section was drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 2). The excavations were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

## **3 RESULTS**

### **3.1 Description of deposits**

- 3.1.1 The base of the trench cut 0.1 m deep into the top of a layer of friable dark yellow-brown sandy silt (4). This produced small stone fragments, fragments of white wall plaster and inclusions of a pinkish lime mortar. Overlying this was a 0.16 m thick layer of friable, pale yellow-brown sandy silt (3). This context also contained small stone fragments and fragments of white wall plaster. This was sealed by a 0.08 m thick layer of grey lime mortar (2), which formed the bed for the 19th century stone slab floor (1) (Fig. 2, section 1).

### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Undiagnostic fragments of red brick were observed in both layers (3) and (4), these were evaluated on site but not retained. No other dating evidence was recovered.

### 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 depth of the excavation was such that only construction levels relating to the 19th century renovation of the church were encountered, and that no evidence for earlier deposits or structures was observed.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth/ Height</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Surface	0.08 m	1.16 m	Stone slab floor	-	C19th
2	Layer	0.025 m	1.16 m	Lime mortar bed for surface 1	-	C19th
3	Layer	0.16 m	-	Construction level	Wall plaster, stone, brick	C19th
4	Layer	> 0.1 m	-	Construction level	Wall plaster, lime mortar, stone, brick	C19th

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

R. Griffiths, R Hepworth and L. Fray, 2001 *St. Mary, Lower Heyford : A Brief History*

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. Mary's Church, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** LHSMC 05

**Grid reference:** SP 485 248

**Type of watching brief:** Hand dug service trench

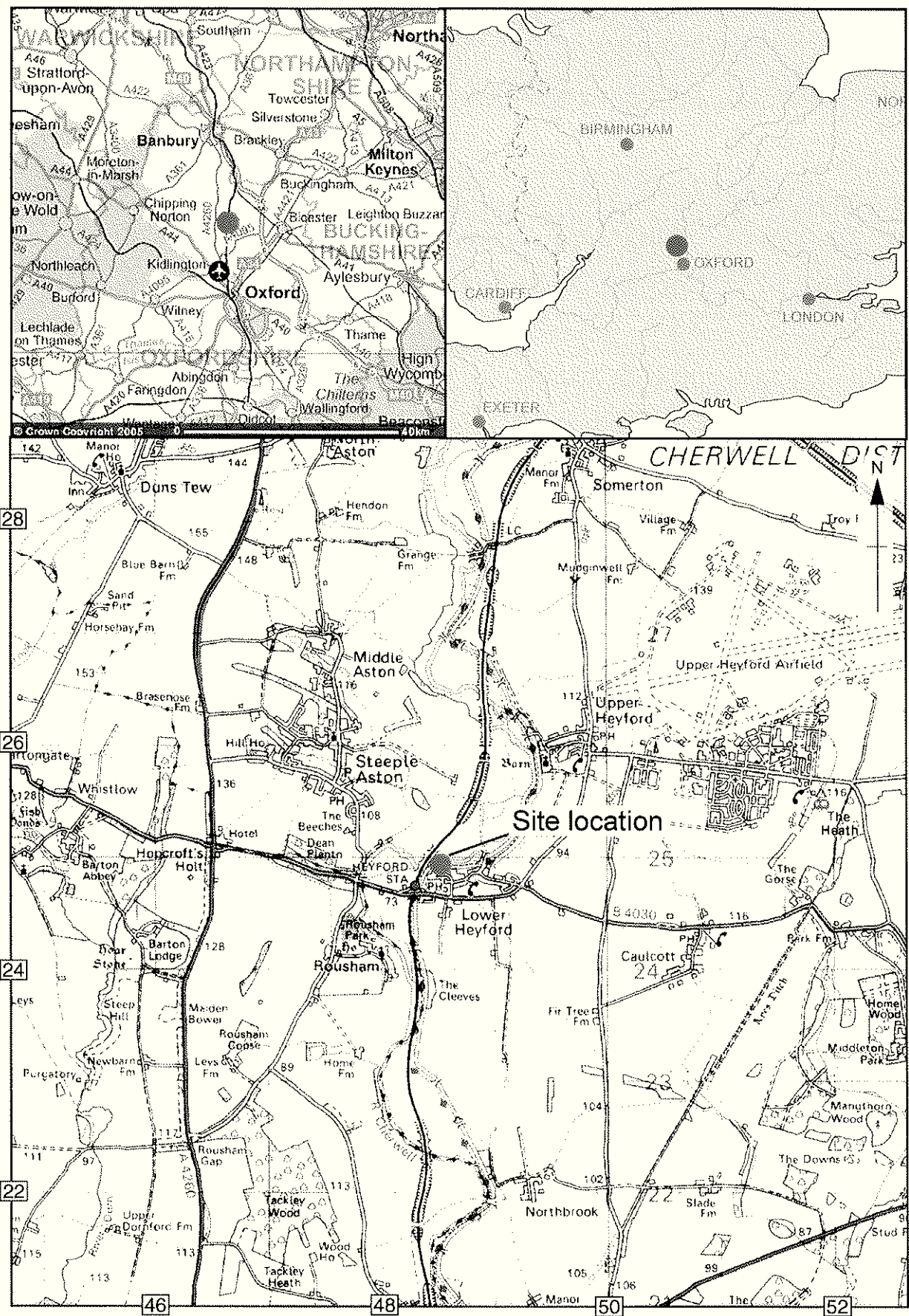
**Date and duration of project:** October 6th, 2005, 3 hours

**Area of site:** 4 m<sup>2</sup>

**Summary of results:** 19th century construction levels from the 1848 and 1867 renovations

**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.





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Figure 1: Site location



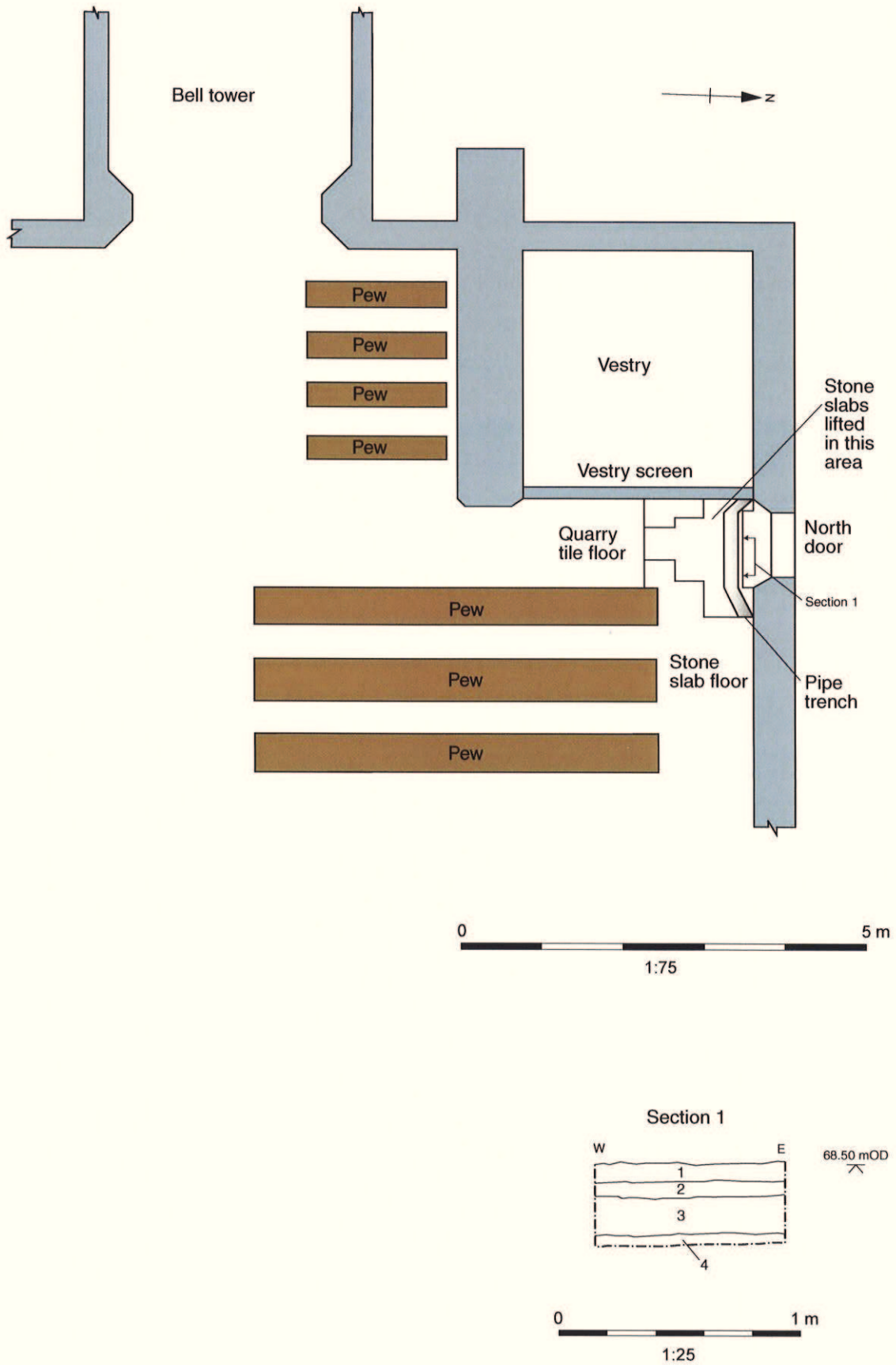


Figure 2: Plan showing area of watching brief and section 1



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