

Church Of St. Mary The Virgin Kintbury, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

NGR SU 388 668

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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CHURCH OF St MARY THE VIRGIN, KINTBURY, BERKS

(NGR SU388668)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) conducted a watching brief at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Kintbury, Berkshire, in January 1995, during works to underpin and buttress the NW corner of the N transept. The contractors were R.D. Smallbone Ltd of Newbury.

An archaeological watching brief was considered necessary due to the likely presence of burials in the area to be excavated.

The site was visited on three occasions during the operation.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Kintbury lies on the slopes of a chalk ridge above the River Kennet. The earliest known reference to the place-name appears in a 10th century document as 'Cynetanbrig', and archaeological evidence of a substantial Saxon burial ground in the vicinity suggests the presence of an important settlement. However, there is no mention of a church at Kintbury in Domesday. The present Church dates to the early 12th century. The tower and the N transept were added early in the 13th century, and the S transept was built in 1713. Extensive restoration of the Church took place in 1859.

METHODOLOGY (Fig.1 & 2)

The operation initially required a area of approximately 12 sq m to be excavated to a depth of 2.0m against the W side of the transept, to provide for a concrete base for a new buttress (Fig 1). This phase of the operation was satisfactorily observed.

The excavation continued for approximately 2 m along the N wall of the transept, and under the wall to link with a small trench inside the transept, to enable the wall to be underpinned. Due to the poor stability of the wall, and the possibility of structural collapse during this operation there was no opportunity for archaeological observation of revealed deposits.

RESULTS (Fig. 2)

The buttress trench was hand excavated by the contractor to a mean depth of 2.1 m. The horizon of undisturbed natural chalk (4) was approximately 1.80 m below present ground level, tipping very slightly to the N. Where not disturbed by later features, this

was overlaid by a layer of mixed dark brown silty clay with 30% chalk fragments (3).

As seen in section 2, layer 9 which appears to correspond to (3), had been slightly truncated by the construction of the flint transept wall (7), and its footing (8) of flint in a silty clay matrix. No dating evidence was recovered from layers 3 or 9.

The exposed part of wall (7) revealed an area of brickwork (16) infilling an area 0.40 m deep and at least 0.50 m wide. This was finished flush with the wall face and set on the top of the footing layer (8).

Partly revealed under the ashlar blocks of the corner of wall (7) was a roughly worked sarsen slab (12). This was resting on a 0.20 m deep x 0.50 m wide layer of concrete (11) which extended along the side of the wall to the S.

Overlying the layers 3 and 9 was a 1.50 m deep layer of mixed silty loam and approximately 30% decayed chalk (2). Inclusions of stone and tile fragments, and redeposited human bone were noted.

Against the N side of the trench, layer 2 was cut by a W-E grave (5). A small sondage dug below the general excavation depth revealed the pelvic area of the burial (6). Sufficient was cleared to establish that the burial was probably that of an adult, supine, with the head to the W. Fragments of coffin fittings and a coffin plate were identified, although the latter was too badly corroded for any inscription to be discerned. Given that the burial was below the excavation depth, it was not disturbed further.

The sides of two 19th century brick vaults were revealed on the W and S sides of the trench (13), (14).

A quantity of human bone fragments were recovered by the contractors during the excavation. These were re-interred prior to the construction of the buttress.

DISCUSSION

The brick infilling (16), and the concrete layer (11) could be interpreted as two earlier attempts to rectify subsidence problems in this area. The bricks appear to be similar in character to those in the S transept, which may indicate that this work was undertaken at the same time as the S transept's construction in the 18th century. The concrete slab (11) is a more recent attempt, probably 20th century.

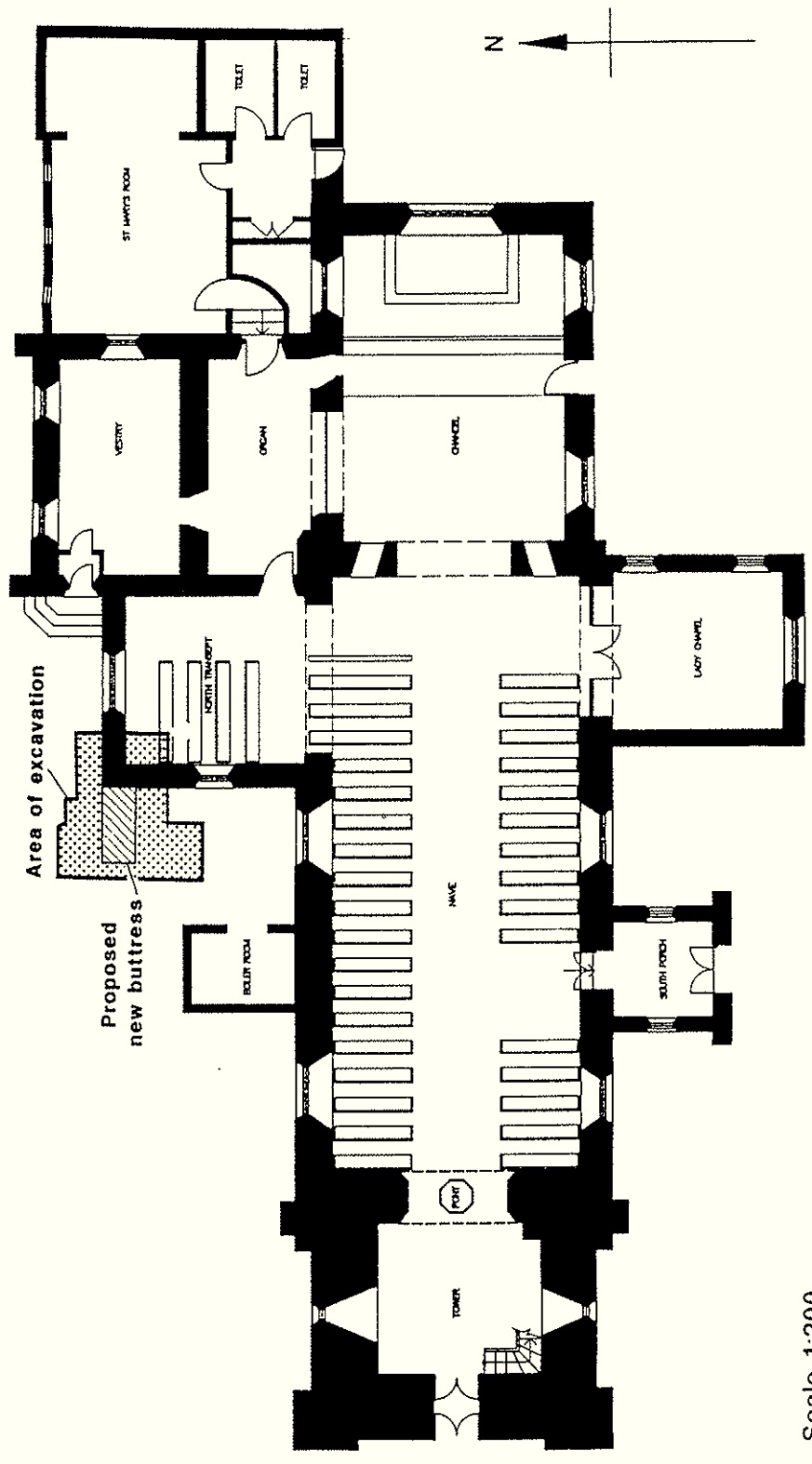
With the exception of these two 'minor' repairs, the evidence from this watching brief suggests that the wall exposed is part of the original 13th century transept structure.

Only one grave was revealed by the excavation. By the coffin fittings this can be dated to the early/mid 19th century. It would seem unlikely that this grave relates to the standing headstone (15) immediately to the E. The stone is offset to the

S of the line of the grave, and one would expect it to be at the head of the grave, not at the foot. However, there was no headstone at the head of grave 5, so there remains the possibility that stone 15 belongs to grave 5, but, for some reason, has been moved.

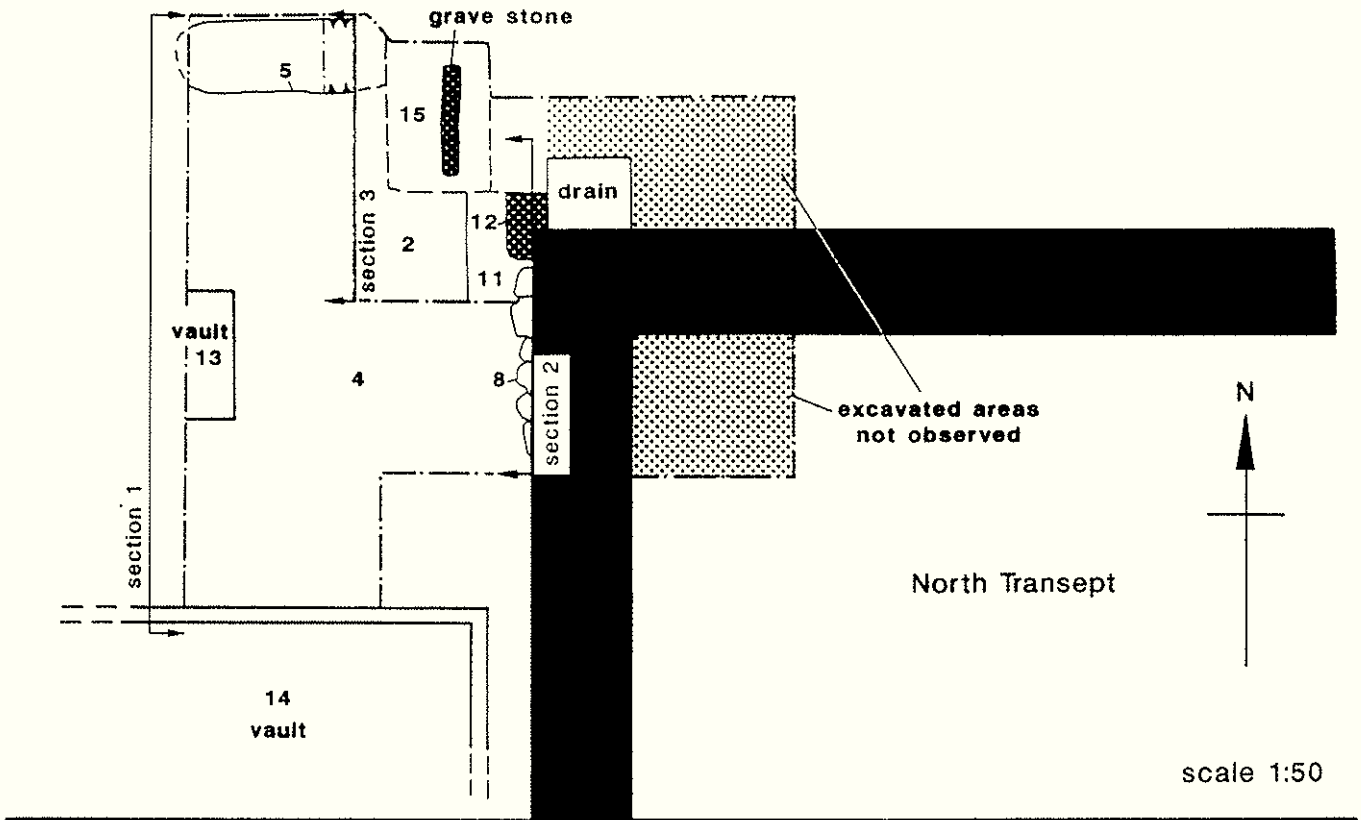
The quantity of human bone fragments discovered, and the depth of layer 2, which represents ground disturbed by grave digging, suggest that the area has been used for burials. The reason for the lack of intact burials discovered probably relates to the disturbance caused by the construction of the brick vaults, and indeed the digging of grave 5. It should also be remembered that the N side of a church has, historically, always been less favoured than the S side for burials.

Alan Hardy
OAU 1995

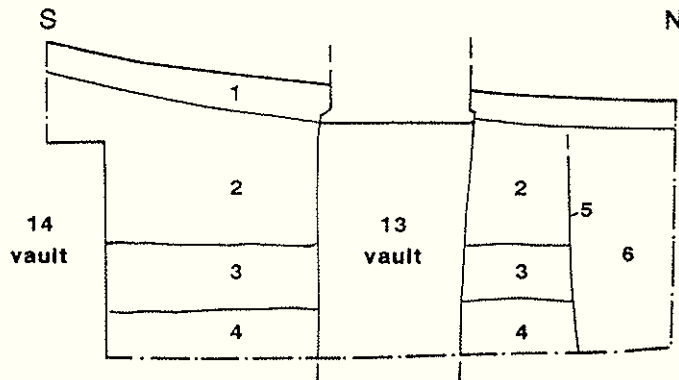


Scale 1:200

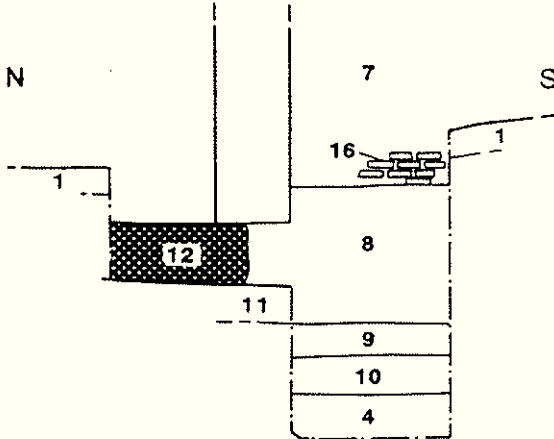
figure 1



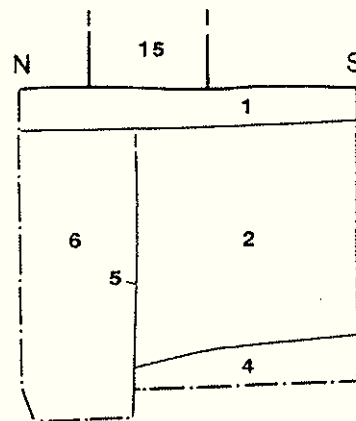
section 1



section 2



section 3



scale 1:50
figure 2

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