

New Retaining Wall St Lawrence Church Alton Hampshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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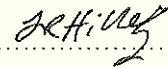
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New Retaining Wall, St Lawrence Church, Alton, Hampshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In December 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Lawrence Church, Alton, Hampshire (NGR: SU 716 395). The work was commissioned by Alton Town Council in advance of the reconstruction of a retaining wall bounding the west side of the churchyard. The watching brief revealed deposits of post-medieval made ground and the presence of two undated articulated burials. No other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In December 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Lawrence Church, Alton, Hampshire (NGR: SU 715 395). The work was commissioned by Alton Town Council in respect of a proposal to demolish and rebuild a retaining wall bounding the west side of the churchyard.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The town of Alton is situated approximately 12 km south-west of Basingstoke on the northern edge of the South Downs (Fig. 1). The Church of St Lawrence lies at the top of Amberley Hill in roughly the centre of the town. The development is situated on the western edge of the churchyard at approximately 111 m above OD. The underlying geology is clay with flints overlying Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet no. 300).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared from Pevsner's Buildings of England and an abridged description is produced below.

1.3.2 The church of St Lawrence is a perpendicular town church built round a Norman crossing tower. All four Norman arches are still *in situ* and can be stylistically dated c1100. The church had a south arcade added to it c1140. Slight traces of this feature survive inside, and these are the remains of the pier imposts with a band of ornament.

1.3.3 The tower now stands in the south aisle. In the 15th century a new nave and chancel were built north of the earlier church, and at the same time the former nave was rebuilt. The original chancel underwent alterations and a new south vestry and north chapel were also built at this time.

1.3.4 The exterior of the church is 15th century throughout, except for the Victorian broach spire and later rendering on the porch and the south face of the church.

- 1.3.5 The churchyard has been landscaped in the 20th century and the majority of the grave markers were moved to the outside edge of the churchyard. The dates on these indicate that the churchyard ceased to be used during the late 19th century.
- 1.3.6 During the construction of an extension to the adjoining junior school, a number of burials were encountered. The original wall is of late 19th/early 20th century construction and may not reflect the true extent of the churchyard.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record 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 such features that may be damaged or destroyed during the building work.
- 2.1.3 To identify the presence of human burials and to minimise the impact of the development on such features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous archaeological presence during excavations likely to impact on archaeologically sensitive deposits. The work consisted of the demolition of the existing wall, the removal of the foundations and the excavation of a 1 m wide foundation trench to a depth of a minimum of 0.5 m below the current pavement level. These works were undertaken using a 2 tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.5 m wide bucket.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2, site plan) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and 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* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 At the extreme northern and southern ends of the foundation trench a deposit of red-brown silt clay containing a large amount of small sub-angular flints (6) was encountered at a depth of 0.4 m below the current road level (Fig. 2, Section 2). At the southern end of the site this was overlaid by a lens of dark grey-brown clay silt (5) measuring up to 0.3 m deep and 2.5 m wide. Within the central area of the trench the surface of layer 6 dipped downwards and was overlaid by a layer of grey clay silt

(4). This deposit contained many small sub-angular flints and pebbles and could be seen to be in excess of 0.25 m deep in section (Fig. 2, Section 1). Overlying this, and deposits 5 and 6 in the southern area of trench, was a layer of dark grey clay silt (3), which produced some small fragments of red brick and tile. This was sealed by a layer of dark brown clay silt (2), measuring between 0.3 m and 0.5 m in depth. This deposit produced numerous fragments of pottery, bottle glass, brick and tile. This was overlaid by a layer of dark grey/black silt clay loam (1), between 0.3 m and 0.5 m in depth. This layer also produced fragments of pottery, bottle glass, brick and tile.

- 3.1.2 At two locations within the trench burials were encountered within layer 3, both on east-west orientations. The excavation only clipped the extreme western edge of these inhumations and the skeletons were left *in situ*. No obvious grave cuts were visible in the section.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the finds recovered were dated to the latter part of the 19th century or later. These finds included pottery, bottle glass and fragments of brick and tile and were probably deposited during the landscaping of the churchyard. These finds were evaluated on site but were not retained.

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 Layer 6 represents a layer of colluvium, probably prehistoric in origin. Layer 5 is possibly a buried soil horizon, or more probably, a lens of organic tinged colluvium. Layer 4 represents a later deposit of colluvium. Layer 3 is a probable buried soil horizon and represents the original churchyard soil. The presence of the inhumations within the deposit would confirm this supposition. The absence of discernible grave cuts may be accounted for by the reuse of excavated material to backfill the cuts. The apparent shallowness of the graves (both were c1.2 m below the current ground level) is consistent with medieval or early post-medieval burials, but difficult to be certain. However another possibility is that this is the result of the modern landscaping of the site.
- 4.1.2 Layer 2 is a probable layer of made ground. The presence of post-medieval finds within it suggest that it may have been deposited after the cessation of burials within the churchyard. Similarly layer 1 is also a layer of made ground probably deposited during landscaping work in the churchyard during the 20th century.
- 4.1.3 No evidence for any other archaeologically significant activity was encountered during the course of the watching brief. It is probable that because of its hilltop location it had only previously been used for agriculture prior to the founding of the

church. The presence of a substantial Georgian farmhouse nearby would suggest that this area was always agricultural in origin prior to the 19th century encroachment by the town.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.3 m - 0.45 m	Made ground/ modern landscaping layer	Pottery, bottle glass, brick, tile	C20th
2	Layer	0.3 m - 0.4 m	Made ground	Pottery, bottle glass, brick, tile	C19th
3	Layer	0.3 m - 0.4 m	Buried soil horizon, original churchyard soil	Brick	C11th- C19th
4	Layer	> 0.3 m	Colluvium	-	-
5	Layer	0.2 m	Colluvium	-	-
6	Layer	> 0.2 m	Colluvium	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

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

Pevsner, N, 1967 *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Retaining Wall, St Lawrence Church, Alton, Hampshire

Site code: ALSLC 06

Grid reference: SU 716 395

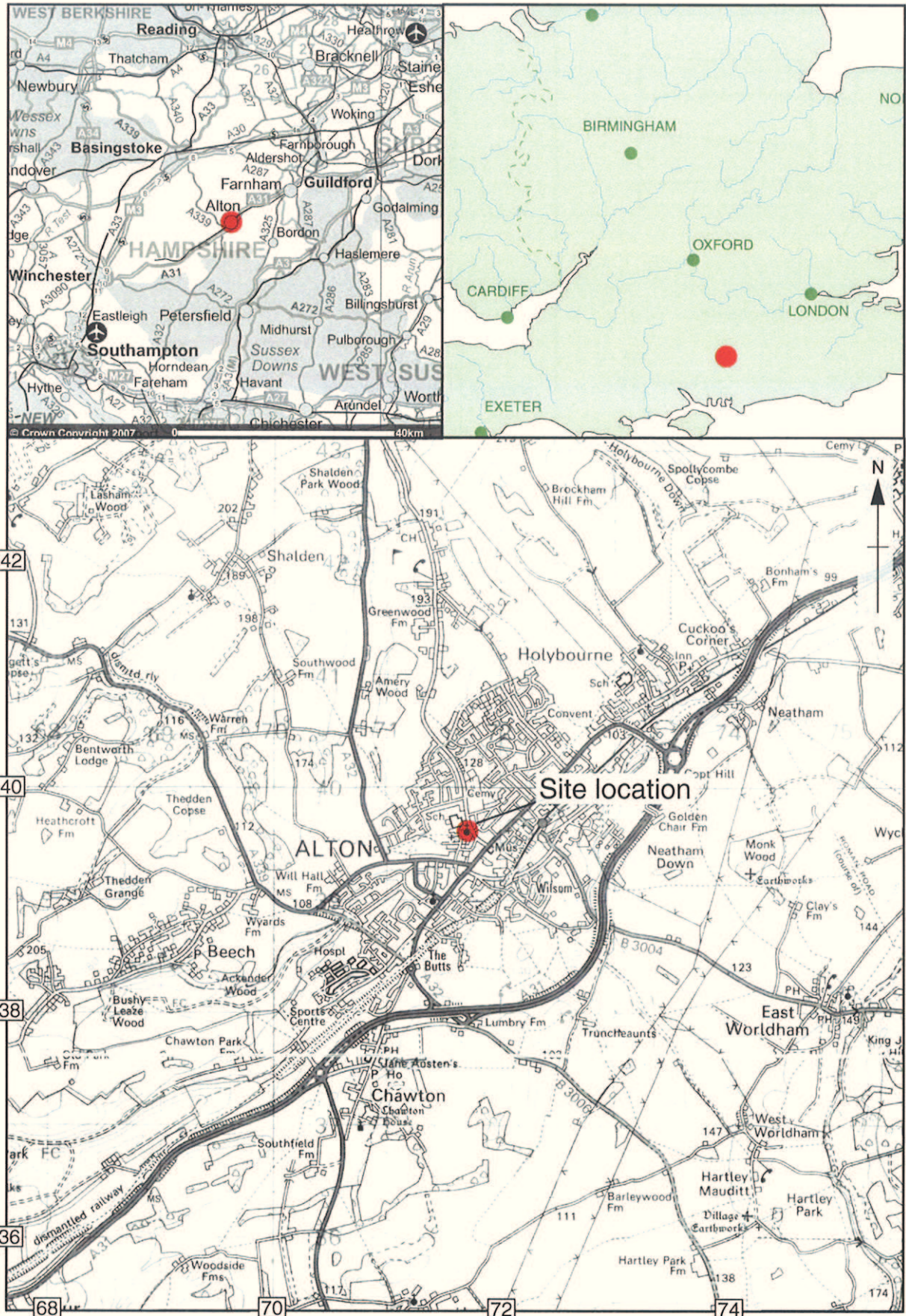
Type of watching brief: Machine excavated foundation trench

Date and duration of project: 14th to 20th December 2006, 5 days

Area of site: c.100m²

Summary of results: The excavation revealed deposits of modern made ground sealing a buried soil horizon. 2 inhumations were encountered. No significant archaeology was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Hampshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: A2006.62



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Figure 1: Site location

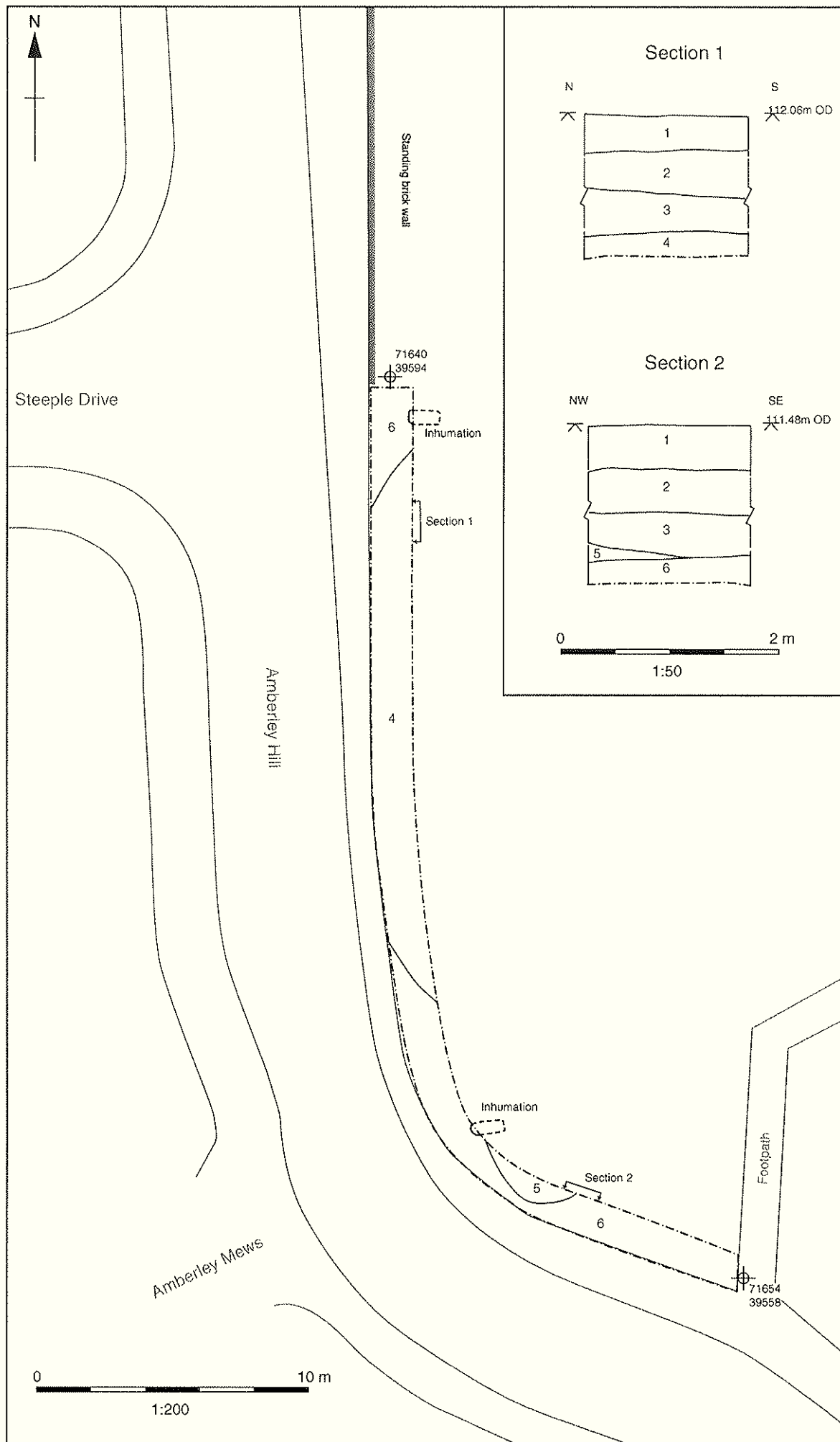











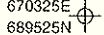



Figure 2: Site plan and sections

	Section line and number
	Section through feature not illustrated with section drawing
	Limit of excavation
	Sondage / Interior limit of excavation
	Fill line and number
	Cut line and number
	Structure number
	Unclear boundary
	Stones
	Hachures indicate inclination of slope inside excavated feature
	Levels
	Grid point
	Continuation line (trench edge continues)



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