

**EXTENSION TO CHURCHYARD AT BARFORD
ST. MICHAEL AND ST JOHN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

Summary

A field evaluation was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) to the S of the Church of St. Michael and St John, Barford on behalf of the Parish Council. There was a substantial wall footing with unglazed medieval pottery and ploughsoils which are probably from medieval ridge and furrow cultivation.

Introduction

On 5th March 1993 an evaluation was carried out by the OAU on behalf of Barford St. Michael and St John Parish Council in respect of an application for planning permission to extend the churchyard. The site was N of the parish church at grid reference SU 43263257 (Fig.1).

Archaeological background

In the interests of economy, no further documentary research has been carried out other than a synopsis of the background detailed on the brief received from the County Archaeologist. The 12th century church stands on a man-made mound. 'Massive walls' were found in the churchyard in 1823 which may be related to the tradition of a castle at Barford St. Michael. Roman coins and pottery were found in the churchyard in the 19th century and Roman pottery was found in the garden of the former vicarage when a swimming pool was built in 1983.

Topography

The site lies on the W side of the ridge on which Barford St. Michael is built. The site was approximately 1.8 hectares at a height of 104-107 m O.D. Most of the site is flattish but the slope increases to the N and W. The site had not been ploughed recently but had been intensively ploughed prior to this date. The natural subsoil across the site was clay.

Assessment strategy (Fig. 1)

The assessment strategy was based on a 2% sample of the area: two 12 m long and 1.5 m wide trenches dug by a JCB mechanical excavator (see Fig. 1). Trench 2 had to be moved and split into two (trenches 2 and 3) in order to avoid an overhead electricity cable.

The archaeological features encountered were hand cleaned to determine their nature and depth and to recover dating evidence. The feature was planned at scales of 1:20 and 1:50.

Results

Soils

The general soil type was a slightly silty clay. The underlying subsoil was clay.

Archaeology

The wall foundation (4) in trench 1 was found at 0.7 m from the ground level and is 0.93 m wide but only one course high (see Fig. 2). The wall foundation is faced on both sides and has a rubble infill but is not mortared. Five sherds of unglazed medieval pottery were retrieved from the soil around the stones (13). The stones of the wall foundation appear to have been dragged to either side by ploughing. The wall foundation is overlaid by ploughsoil (2) which may be from ridge and furrow cultivation 0.52 m thick although no variation in thickness was seen in trench 1. Vestigial furrows can be seen in the field (see Fig. 1).

The other trenches did not reveal any other archaeological features. There was a field drain in trench 3 which cut the old ploughsoil. The depth of the old ploughsoil varied as a consequence of ridged cultivation (see fig. 1 and table 1). It should be noted that there were no noticeable large deposits of stones in the old ploughsoil which may have derived from ploughed out stone structures.

Finds

In total 13 sherds of pottery and one tile were recovered. The modern topsoil contained 4 sherds of pottery of modern date. The medieval pottery was not closely datable; most of the fabrics range in date from the 12th to the 14th century. The old ploughsoil (2) around the wall foundation contained 6 sherds of 12th to 14th century pottery of fabric OXY. There were four sherds of pottery from the wall foundation matrix (13) around the stones and these were of OXBK and OXAE fabric and of 12th to 14th century date. In view of the proximity of Roman remains the absence of Roman finds, other than a single flagon sherd from the old ploughsoil (9) in trench 3, is noteworthy.

Environmental

Soil samples were not taken.

Comments on the results

The wall foundation was apparently built in a trench as no disturbance was seen around the wall foundation. The fact that the wall foundation was faced implies that the structure was large and possibly of high status; low status early medieval structures usually have rubble foundations as the overlying structure is of wood not stone. The width of the foundation (0.93 m) also suggests that the structure is large. The pottery around and in the wall foundation suggest that the structure is of a domestic nature although no floors were located to indicate the use of the structure. The depth from modern ground level (0.7 m) suggests that the structure was substantial ie it was of sufficient size to need deep foundations.

No deposits of stone were seen in the old ploughsoil in the nearby trenches. This shows the length of time which the site has been ploughed as the stones may have been moved downhill by ploughing. The presence of vestigial furrows on the same alignment as nearby visible ridge and furrow cultivation to the N suggest that it was medieval ploughing. As the wall foundation is 5 m from the nearest 'furrow' it could have been preserved under a ridge which are commonly multiples of one rod, pole or perch (5.03 m) apart. The observed vestigial furrows were 16, 22 and 13 m apart which may show realignment of the original strip fields over a considerable time.

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Appendix

**TABLE 1
CONTEXTS AND FINDS**

TRENCH	CTX	TYPE	WIDTH	THICKNESS	DATE OF POTTERY
1	1	ploughsoil/turf	-	0.21	
1	2	old ploughsoil		0.52	6 OXY (12th-14th)
1	3	subsoil		-	
1	4	wall foundation	0.93	0.10	
2	5	ploughsoil/turf	-	0.26- 0.3	
2	6	old ploughsoil		0.39	
2	7	subsoil		-	
3	8	ploughsoil/turf		0.50	
3	9	old ploughsoil		0.16	1 Roman flagon sherd (whiteware)
3	10	subsoil		-	
3	11	drain cut	0.30	0.40	
3	12	drain fill	-	-	
3	13	matrix of soil around stones (wall foundation 4)	-	-	1 OXBK (12th-14th), 2 OXAE (12th-14th), 1 tile.

Trench Location Plan

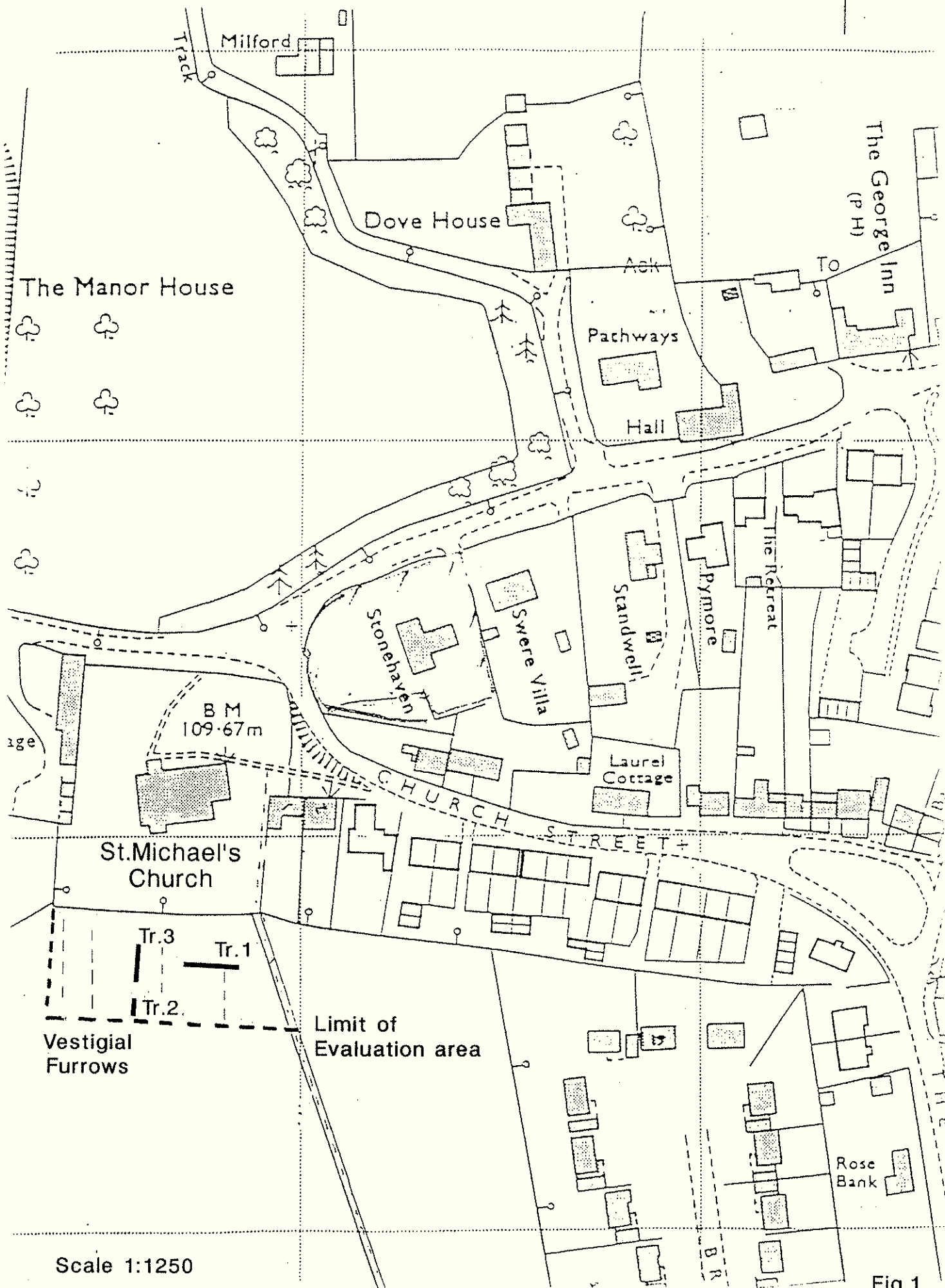


Fig. 1

Barford, St. Michael's Church.
Trench 1

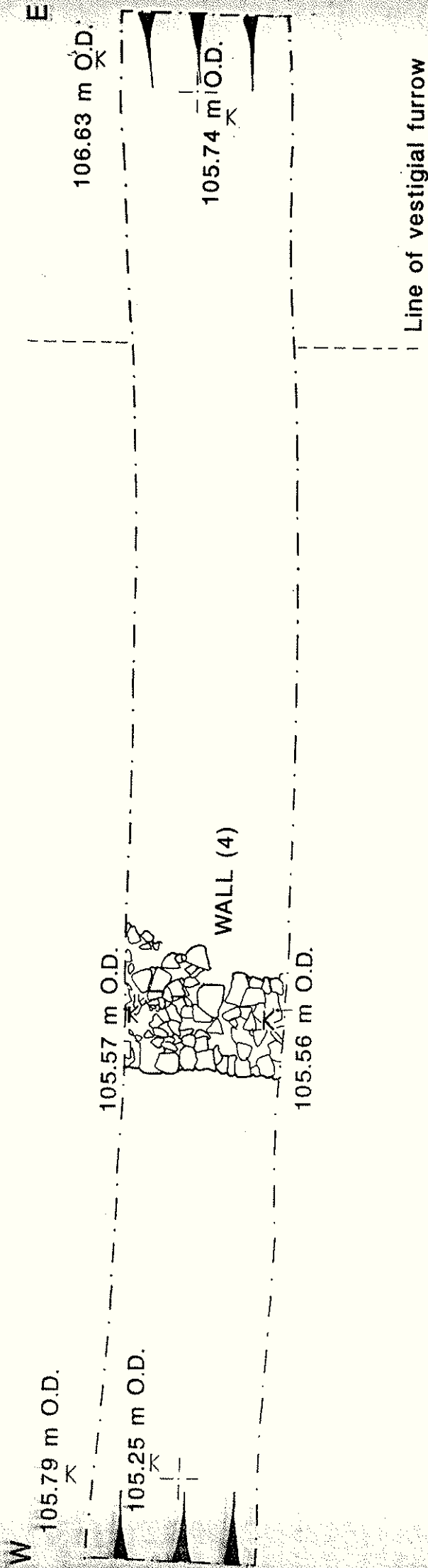


Fig.2