

**LAMBERT TOMB, ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH,
WINTERBOURNE STEEPLETON, DORSET**
Archaeological Evaluation



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Lambert Tomb, St Michael's Church, Winterbourne Steepleton, Dorset Archaeological Evaluation, February 2005

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St Michael's Church, Winterbourne Steepleton, Dorset

Archaeological Evaluation, February 2005

SUMMARY

Terrain Archaeology carried out an evaluation of the structure known as the Lambert Tomb, built against the north wall of St Michael's Church, Winterbourne Steepleton, (NGR SY62918980) during February 2005. This revealed part of a brick vaulted structure capped with clay and sealed beneath a soil mound. The southern end of this structure, where it butted against the church wall, has stone retaining walls and was covered in stone slabs. The central slab has a date of 1764. The tomb appears to be of a single period of construction.

INTRODUCTION

This project was commissioned by Winterbourne Steepleton P.C.C., through their architect, Ronald Jones of John Stark & Crickmay Partnership. Areas of damp on the internal face of the north wall of the nave of the church are thought to be associated with a stone structure, known as the Lambert Tomb, which butts against the corresponding external part of the church wall. Preliminary investigation undertaken by the architect and Sue and Laurence Kelland suggested that this feature was filled with soil, casting doubt on the interpretation that it is a burial vault.

In order to determine the nature and construction of this structure, Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council advised that an archaeological test pit should be excavated through it against the north wall of the church and he provided a written outline brief for this work (Appendix 1). This archaeological evaluation was to be sufficient to ascertain its nature and construction and to provide enough information to enable the architect to formulate the most appropriate methods for damp-proofing the church wall. Damp-proofing work is essential to protect the early wall paintings within the church that may otherwise be adversely affected.

St Michael's Church stands at the east end of the village, on the north side of the main road through Winterbourne Steepleton, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY62918980 (Figure 1). The Lambert Tomb lies at a height of between about 92 m and 92.9 m above OD.

The fieldwork was carried out on 14th and 15th February 2005 by Rod Brook and Rebecca Montague.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge St Michael's Church, especially Trevor Bassett, Church Warden, Ron Jones of John Stark & Crickmay Partnership, Sue and Laurence Kelland, Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council, and Jo Draper for their help and cooperation during this project.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St Michael's Church lies at the east end of the village of Winterbourne Steepleton. The earliest parts of the church are the quoins at the SE, NW and SW corners of the nave, which date to the first half of the eleventh century (Late Saxon). The nave was rebuilt in the twelfth century; the west tower and the porch date from the fourteenth century and the chancel was rebuilt in the fifteenth century (RCHME 1970).

A north chapel was built in the fifteenth century, at the east end of the nave. This was demolished in 1688 (Hutchins 1863, 776) and all that remains is the blocked two-centred arch in the north wall of the nave.

The Lambert Tomb lies in the area of the former north chapel and butts against the north wall of the nave. It comprises a pronounced linear turfed soil mound, about 6.7 m long and 5.5 m wide, aligned approximately north-south, with a more formal monumental stone treatment of the southern end against the church (Figure 2, Plates 1–2). This is the only external feature butting against the wall of the church: elsewhere there is a cleared and concreted drainage area running around the church. The highest part of the tomb is where it against the church wall.

The east and west stone walls of the tomb extend 1.5 m from the church wall, and comprise lower courses of large limestone blocks with the main part of the wall formed by more finely dressed tabular slabs set near-vertically (Plate 2). One of the near-vertical slabs from the eastern side has fallen loose and is lying on the ground nearby. These walls are in a poor state of repair. It is roofed by four large rectangular limestone slabs, jointed together, with a large rectangular gravestone, bearing the inscription "LAPIS SEPVLCRALIS LAMBERT MDCCLXIV", set horizontally at the apex. The southern ends of the slabs are slightly rebated into the church wall, with the junction between the rendered wall and the slabs protected by some now rather tatty lead flashing. The easternmost and westernmost slabs have had a square section removed at the northeast and northwest corners respectively. These have been replaced with another stone of a similar size, and may represent the location of some sort of ironwork railing structure, now removed, around the slabs. The easternmost and westernmost slabs are in poor condition, with stone flaking off the upper surfaces. The easternmost slab is broken into several pieces.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological works was to evaluate the nature and construction of the structure, in sufficient detail to enable the architect to design an appropriate damp-proofing scheme for the church.

The evaluation aimed to record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the works in order to provide sufficient data to assess the archaeological significance of the site.

METHODS

The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*. An outline brief was prepared by Steven Wallis: this was followed without significant deviation in the field.

Prior to the commencement of the archaeological evaluation, the three central stone slabs had been removed by Sue and Laurence Kelland, exposing the soil layer beneath.

A single hand-excavated test pit (Test pit 1) was excavated through the highest point of the Lambert Tomb, against the exterior of north wall of the church (Figure 2). The original size of the test pit was 1 m by 1 m, but the remains of a stone retaining wall were found at the southern end and consequently the size of the pit was reduced to about 0.6 m by 1 m, in order to leave the wall *in situ*. It was dug to a maximum depth of 0.92 m. Excavation was halted when structural remains were encountered.

All archaeological deposits and features exposed during the works were excavated by hand. All features and deposits revealed, irrespective of their apparent archaeological significance, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

The test pit was back-filled with the excavated material and compacted by hand; a few of the larger limestone blocks from the fill were left out in case they were needed at a later date for the restoration of the tomb. The three central stone slabs were not reinstated as further work is planned.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum, Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

Tomb Structure

The results of the test pit excavation have provided sufficient information to enable the general structure of the Lambert Tomb to be understood, but not enough to allow a complete reconstruction to be attempted. The plan and section of the tomb are shown on Figures 2 and 3.

At the core of the mound is a brick vault (107). Its full dimensions and shape are not known. The upper surface of the vault was encountered at a depth of between 0.76 m and 0.89 m below the top of the tomb (at between 91.96 m and 91.81 m OD). The apex of the vault lay in the western part of the test pit (Figure 3). This was some 0.2 m – 0.5 m to the west of the apex of the blocked north chapel arch in the north wall of the nave. Not enough was exposed to enable the full width of the vault to be projected. The upper surface of the vault lay some 2.7 m below the top of the former opening of the chapel; corresponding measurements inside the church show that the upper surface of the vault is some two thirds of the way up the wooden wainscoting. Access to the tomb from within the church would have been down a flight of steps. The vault dipped down to the north (Plate 6).

The bricks of the vault were handmade, measuring 225 x 110 x 60 mm ($8\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{8}$ inches) and are probably 18th century in date. They were laid in a rather irregular fashion. With large pieces of slate inserted into some of the joins to fill up the splay caused by the barrelling (Plate 4). Some of these pieces of slate stood proud of the bricks to a maximum height of 20 mm. The mortar was a compact off-white lime mortar with small sharp crushed flint fragments (10 mm max.) intermixed. The bricks and slate were covered by a thin layer of mortar (106), between 20–30 mm thick. This mortar was similar to the mortar in between the bricks — i.e. an off-white lime mortar with crushed flint inclusions, but in layer 106 the flint inclusions were larger (up to 30 mm) and more frequent.

The vault was then sealed by a capping of hard-packed mottled orange, buff, and rust coloured clay (105), with sparse natural flint gravel cobbles between 20–40 mm across. The upper surface of this clay layer echoed the curve of the underlying barrel vault. This clay was probably applied to seal and waterproof the vault.

The earthen structure of the mound was then built over the burial vault and its clay capping. Initially there appears to have been a 0.2 m thick layer of compact light brown clay loam (108) with frequent chalk fragments and occasional small lumps of mottled clay deposited over the clay capping 105. A rough wall (103) was built on top of this layer, butting against church wall. It was 0.3 m wide and 0.45 m high, and comprised large roughly dressed limestone blocks, up to 300 mm by 180 mm across, bonded with a medium compact buff brown lime mortar. The top of this wall appears to have been disturbed and some of the upper course is missing (Plate 3). The stone in this wall may be reused stone from the North Chapel. The function of this wall is not known. It may have been built to support the stone slabs which form the roof of the structure, or may have helped to contain the soil and prevent it from lying directly against the church wall.

A 0.5 m thick layer of light brown clay loam (104) with flint cobbles, chalk fragments, and lumps of mottled clay was then deposited, filling the area up to the top of wall 103. Some large limestone fragments and roughly dressed blocks up to 300 mm across and a single large Ham Hill stone fragment were found in this layer. It also contained two sherds of 18th century Donyatt pottery, fragments of brick, tile, and slate, together with debris from knapping wall flints. There was also some disarticulated human bone and some coffin nails recovered.

Overlying layer 104 was a loose light brown clayey-silt (102). This was essentially similar to 104, but much looser. It contained similar material (limestone fragments, clay lumps, wall flint debris, brick and tile, slate, fragments of mortar pointing). It also contained some coffin nails and some disarticulated human bone fragments. This layer was dry and uncompacted, as it had been protected by the overlying stone slabs 101. There were some small tabular blocks lying on the surface of 102 - these may have been placed as levelling stones and/or supports for the slabs (101). This layer overlay wall 103. Together, soil layers 108, 104 and 102 form a large mound, a striking feature in the churchyard.

Overlying layer 102 were the stone slab covering (101), which had been removed prior to the excavation.

Finds

A small quantity of finds was recovered and these are quantified in Table 1. All material has been collected and is temporarily stored at Terrain Archaeology's offices. The intention is to rebury all materials within the makeup of the tomb after all remedial work is carried out.

Context	Pottery		Ceramic Building material		Slate		Mortar		Worked Flint and chert		Glass		Iron	Human bone		Animal bone	
	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)
102			8	604	21	141	7	138	30	3382			3	17	184	2	1
104	2	8	32	1172	23	534			72	10872	1	1	10	49	244	2	41
105					1	5											
<i>Total</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>1776</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>680</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>14254</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>428</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>42</i>

Table 1: All finds by context

Pottery

Two small sherds of Donyatt pottery, probably the same vessel, possibly a small jar, were recovered from context 104. This vessel is 18th century in date. The pottery identification was by Jo Draper.

Ceramic Building Material

The brick and tile recovered from contexts 102 and 104 was similar. It comprised 31 fragments of soft handmade bricks in a poorly-wedged orangey-red fabric, six roof tile fragments, and four floor tile pieces. The floor tiles were all found in context 104 and included two small pieces of green glazed tile.

Mortar

A number of fragments of cementitious mortar were found in context 102. These were all fragments of mortar pointing and probably relate to a relatively recent repair.

Worked flint and chert

The majority of the flint was in fresh sharp condition and appears to be the debris from knapping wall flints. The flakes were all large thick squat, mainly primary, flakes removed with a hard

hammer. They included twelve roughly shaped flint nodules. Most of these were fairly irregular and are probably rejected wall flints.

Three flakes do not belong to this assemblage and are probably prehistoric. They include one large Portland Chert trimming blade, of possible Neolithic date, a broken patinated flint blade, also possibly Neolithic in date, and a small patinated flint flake.

Glass

A single small sherd of very thin dark green window glass was found in context 104.

Iron

The iron objects consisted of one fragment of flat plate and eleven nails and tacks. Two sizes of nails are present: 63 mm long (2 examples) and 37 mm long (4 examples). Both types have rectangular-sectioned shanks and square hammered heads. One of the larger nails (from context 104) still has traces of mineralised wood attached to it. In addition, there is one large wrought iron tack 24 mm long with a large circular head, 24 mm in diameter. All these iron objects probably derive from coffins.

Human Bone

The human bone recovered was fragmentary and included fragments of skull, vertebrae, ribs, arm and leg and foot bones. This material appears to have been accidentally incorporated into contexts 102 and 104, rather than representing the remains of a specific burial.

Animal bone

The animal bone comprised two rodent bones, one dog tooth and an unidentified long bone fragment.

CONCLUSIONS

The test pit showed that the Lambert Tomb is clearly a burial vault. It comprised a brick vault, capped with clay, encased in an earthen mound. It had stone retaining walls and roof at the southern end, where it joined the north wall of the church. The junction between the vault and the church was not exposed, but as the brick vault was originally accessed from within the church, it can be assumed that the vault butted against the church wall.

The North Chapel was demolished in 1688, giving a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the Lambert Tomb. The evidence from the excavation indicates that it was a single period construction of 18th century date. The inscription on the central slab gives the date as 1764.

REFERENCES

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Hutchins, J., 1863 | <i>The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset</i> , 2, 3 rd edn, ed. W. Shipp and J. W. Hodson. |
| RCHME 1970 | Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England 1970
<i>An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the county of Dorset</i>
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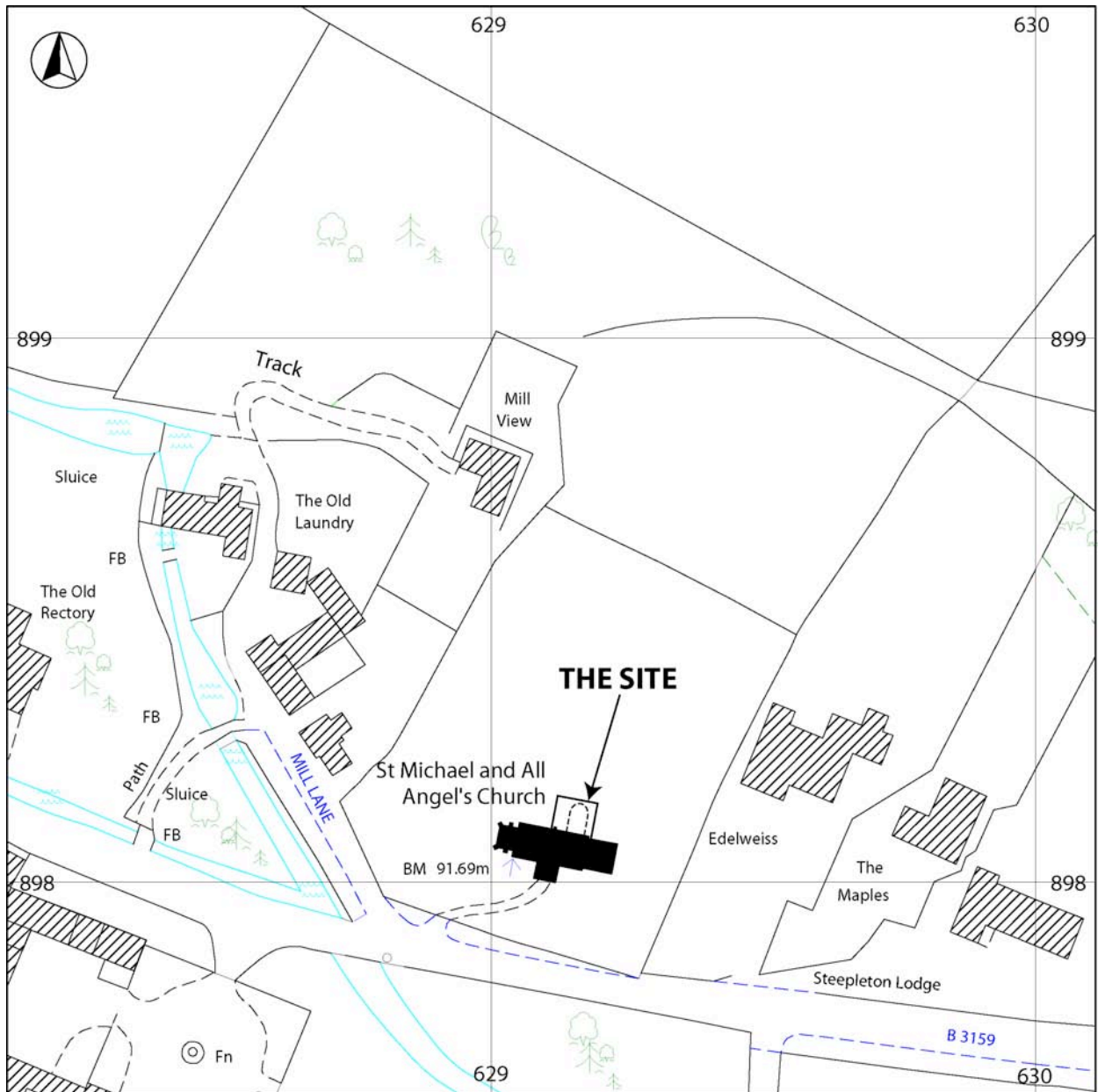


Figure 1: Location Map

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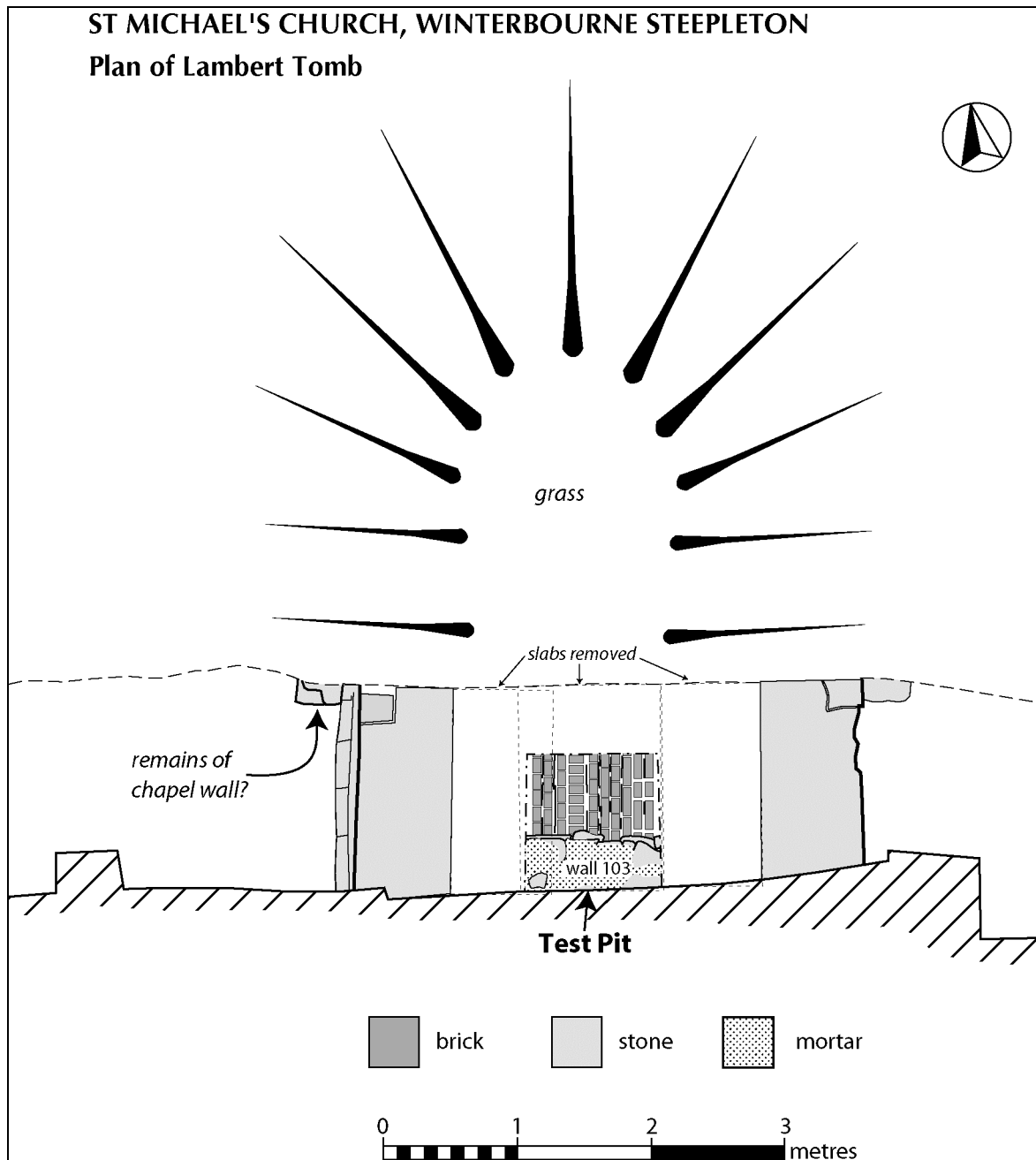


Figure 2: Plan of the Lambert Tomb, showing location of Test Pit.

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, WINTERBOURNE STEEPLETON
Section across Lambert Tomb

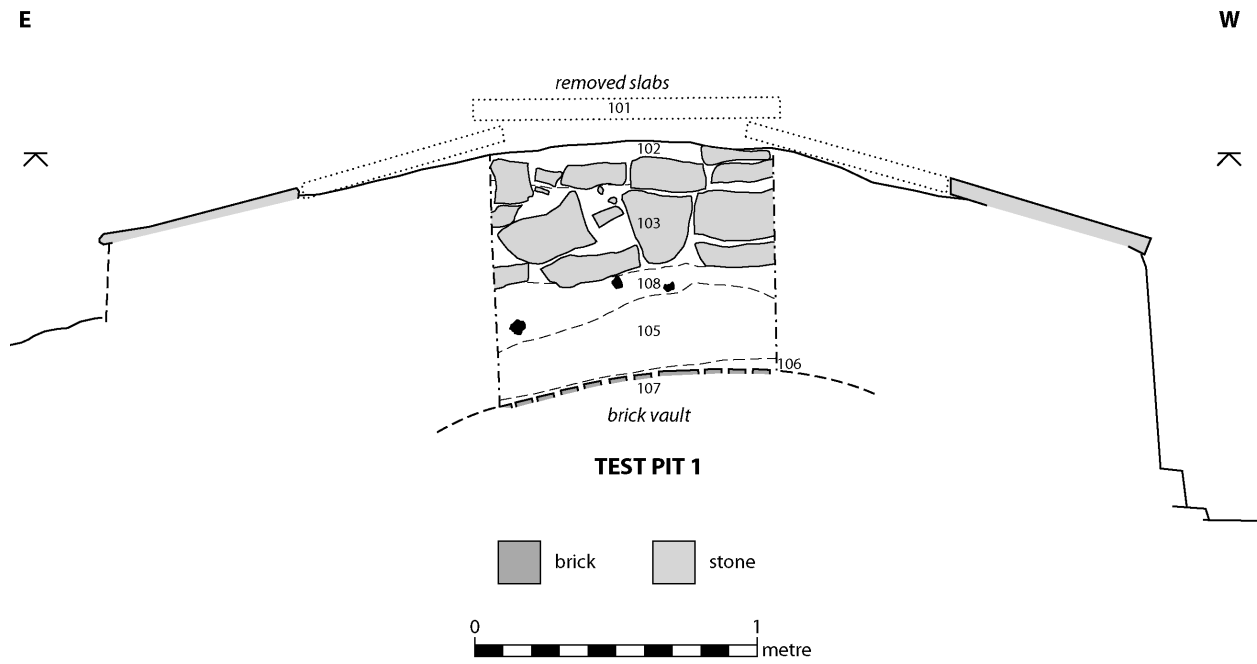


Figure 3: North-facing section across the Lambert Tomb.



Plate 1: View of stone structure of the Lambert Tomb during stone removal. Viewed from northeast.



Plate 2: General view of tomb during excavation. Viewed from west.



Plate 3: Test pit 1 during excavation, showing wall 103 and top of clay capping 105. Viewed from north.



Plate 4: Test pit 1 after excavation, showing top of brick vault 107. Viewed from north.



Plate 5: Test pit 1 after excavation, showing detail of north-facing section.



Plate 6: Test pit 1 after excavation, showing detail of east-facing section.

APPENDIX 1

DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL OUTLINE BRIEF

OUTLINE BRIEF FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL PIT AT WINTERBOURNE STEEPLETON PARISH CHURCH, DORSET

INTRODUCTION

Immediately outside north wall of the nave, there is a structure of uncertain function. There are low stone walls on three sides, with the fourth side formed by the nave wall. The low stone walls seem to be made of re-used paving slabs, and there are five larger slabs on the top, the middle one being an 18th century tombstone. Preliminary investigation undertaken by the architect and Sue and Lawrence Kelland suggests this feature is filled with soil, casting doubt on the obvious interpretation that it is a burial vault.

PURPOSE OF THE WORK

There are damp problems inside the church on the corresponding section of wall, and it is thought that this is linked to the external structure and its soil filling. The inside of the church has a number of early wall paintings, and there is concern about the potential effect of the damp on them. To help determine the appropriate solution, an archaeological investigation of the external structure is needed. The priority of the work is to understand this structure, so flexibility is required in undertaking the archaeological work.

METHODOLOGY

The report by the Sue and Lawrence Kelland is essential background reading before commencing the work.

The architect will remove the central tombstone from the top of the structure (this and any subsequent movements of stone slabs shall take place with the archaeological contractor present). Providing Health and Safety considerations allow, the archaeological contractor shall excavate a trial pit that is 1m square immediately adjacent to the nave wall. The pit shall be dug to a depth of 1.2m or to the top of natural subsoil, whichever is the higher.

If this work has given a clear idea of the structure's function, no further excavation will be needed. However, if this is not the case, further excavation may be appropriate. This is to be decided in consultation with the architect and, if available, the representative of English Heritage and the Diocesan Advisory Committee's archaeological adviser. This further work might include extension of the trial pit eastwards to the eastern wall of the structure (following removal of stone slabs by the architect).

As usual, all archaeological material shall be recorded in detail, in accordance with the standards of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. This recording shall include any fabric of the church building that is exposed. In order to fully understand the nature of the structure, recording of parts of the above-ground wall of the church might also be appropriate.

On completion of the work, all excavated material shall be re-instated by the archaeological contractor. The stone slabs will be re-instated by the architect.