
SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE

The Church of St. Mary, Great Bealings (BEG 016); A record of Archaeological Monitoring associated with the insertion of a new toilet into the base of the tower.
SCC Rpt. No 2007/188; Oasis No. suffolkc1-32719

Summary

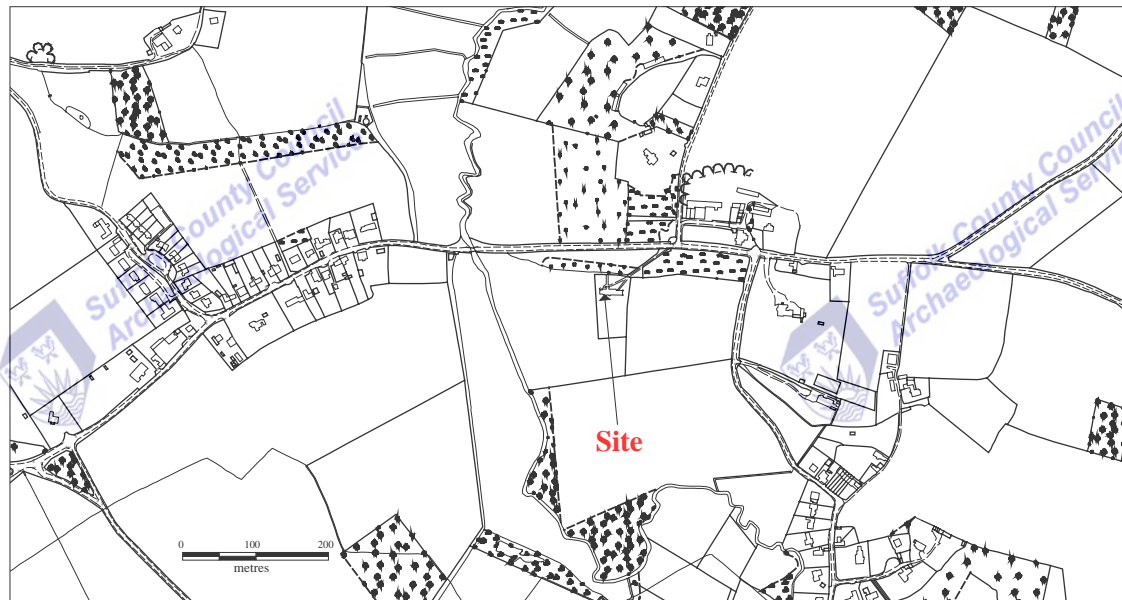
Great Bealings, Church of St. Mary (TM 2308 4886; BEG 016) The insertion of the below ground pipe-work for a new toilet in the tower of the church required the excavation of trenches both internal and external to the standing building. The floor level in the tower was found to be *c.*0.8 metres higher than the external ground-level and comprised successive layers of fill. While the top *c.*0.4 metres were interpreted as later deposits, the lower layers were thought to have been associated with the original construction of the tower and the result of the need to provide a consistently level floor throughout the church on what was a sloping site. (Stuart Boulter for Suffolk County Council & the Great Bealings Parochial Parish Council).

Introduction

The church of St. Mary, Great Bealings overlooks the watermeadows of the River Lark to the west and straddles the 15 metre contour line (TM 2308 4886) (Fig. 1).

The insertion of a new toilet into the floor area enclosed by the base of the tower required significant excavation both internal to and external to the extant structure. The Diocesan Archaeologist (Robert Carr) advised the Parochial Parish Council that as part of the project they would need to fund a programme of archaeological monitoring in order to satisfactorily record the ground disturbance.

Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service Field Projects Team were commissioned by the Parochial Parish Council to undertake the archaeological monitoring. Two site visits were made (9th & 10th of October 2007) during which a record of the excavations was made.



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Fig. 1 1:10,000 scale OS map extract showing the location of the church

Methodology

The locations of the excavated trenches were recorded on a sketch plan (Fig. 2). The exposed stratigraphy in the sides of the trenches were recorded both photographically (digital & monochrome prints) (Plates 1-5) and as drawn sections (Fig. 3).

Results

A plan showing the location of the excavated trench appears as Figure 2. The internal excavation measured *c.*1.10 metre by *c.*0.90 metres while that external was *c.*0.55 metres wide and *c.*2.0 metres long. The tower wall was found to have a *c.*0.1 metre projecting toe, both internally and externally, occurring from a point *c.*0.30 metres up from its base (Fig. 3 & Plates 1, 4 & 5). Internally, the floor surface was found to be *c.*0.80 metres higher than that external to the tower. A series of essentially horizontal layers were visible in the sides of the trenches; these are described below with reference to the numbered section drawing (Fig. 3). These are also visible in Plates 2 and 3.

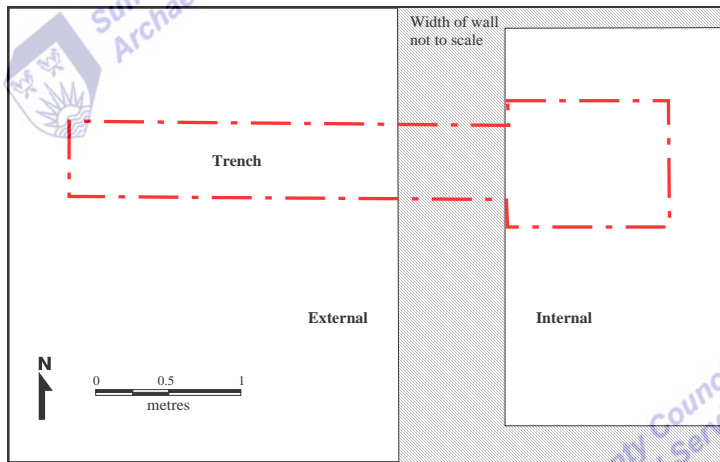


Fig. 2 Location of the excavated trench in the tower

The existing floor internal to the tower comprised stone flags. Immediately below this a *c.*0.2 metre thick layer (1) of buff/yellow coloured fine silty sand was recorded. At the base of this layer on the southern side of the trench a

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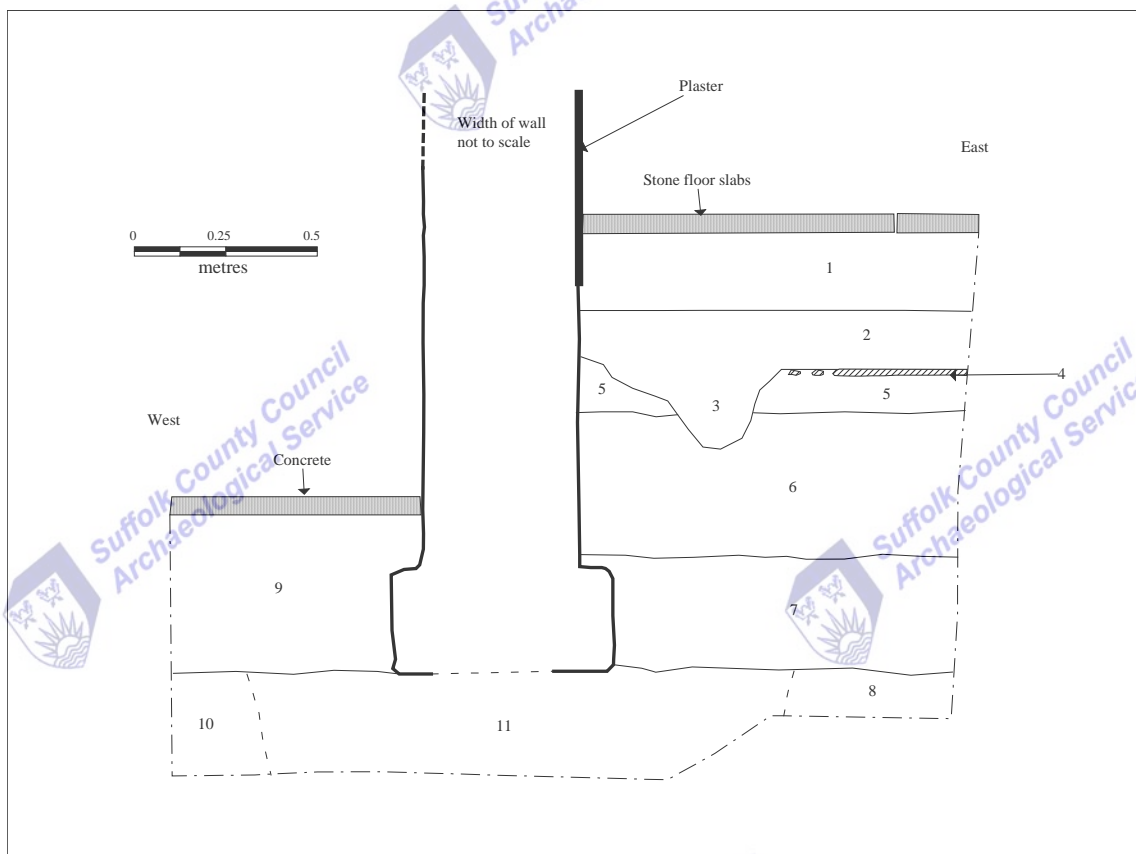


Fig. 3 Detail of the excavated trench.

single course of east to west aligned red bricks (9 inch by 2 inch) were visible (Plate 3), these are interpreted as the support for the joists for an earlier wooden floor. Layer 1 gave way to *c.*0.16 metres of mixed sand, lime mortar and flint rubble (2). This layer was laterally consistent on the southern and eastern sides of the trench, but was essentially indistinguishable from fill (3) on the north side where it appeared in the drawn section. Fill (3) was recorded within what appeared in section to be an incised feature cutting layers (4), (5) and (6), although it may actually represent no more than a localised area of disruption. Layer number (4) was again continuous around the southern and eastern sides of the

trench, but had been truncated in the north face where it was recorded in section. The layer comprised consolidated lime mortar between 1 and 2 centimetres thick and was interpreted as the bedding surface for an earlier, probably tiled floor. Underlying the mortar layer was a c.0.1 metre of loosely compacted sand and lime mortar (5) which, in turn, lay on c.0.4 metres of dark brown coloured sticky clay rich sand (6). Below this, coinciding roughly to a point immediately above the protruding toe of the wall and continuing down to its base, was layer (7) comprising loose sand with some yellow lime mortar and occasional flints. At the eastern end of the internal trench layer (7) overlay a dark brown sand (8). However, from a point c.0.5 metres from the base of the wall the material underlying (7) contained frequent flints and loose lime mortar, a mixture of material that was also seen running under the wall and filling up to a near vertical cut in the external trench (11). This fill has been interpreted as being within a cut footing trench for the tower wall, although its internal edge was fairly conjectural.

The remaining two fills were seen only in the external trench (Fig. 3 & Plate 5). Immediately beneath the concrete path, a c.0.45 metre thick layer of dark brown loam with localised patches of lime mortar and inclusions of roof-tile (9) was recorded continuing down to a similar level as the base of the tower wall. Below this was a layer of clean brown very silty sandy loam (10) through which the vertical cut for the wall footing (11) was seen (Plate 5).

Interpretation

No intact earlier floor surfaces were encountered in the excavated trench internal to the tower, but evidence for two did survive. The most recent of these would have been lain on wooden joists which in turn were supported by the formally lain line of bricks running from east to west through the tower on what would have been its centre line. The depth that these bricks were lain suggests that this floor would have been at approximately the same level as the existing stone floor which was, itself, elevated above that of the nave by c.0.15 metres. The bricks suggest a 19th or 20th century date for this floor.

The evidence for the second floor level was provided by the thin layer of consolidated mortar at a depth of c.0.40. It is likely that this formed the bedding for a tile floor, the tiles of which were subsequently removed. While there is no dating evidence for this floor level, there is no reason why it could not represent the towers original medieval floor level set on deliberately introduced material imported to reconcile the floor level here with those in the body of the church. This process would have been deemed necessary due to the natural slope of the ground down to the watermeadow to the west.

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Plate 1 West side of internal trench



Plate 2 North side of internal trench



Plate 3 South side of internal trench



Plate 4 East end of external trench



Plate 5 North side of external trench

