

**An archaeological investigation
(test pitting) inside St Mary's
Church, Melton Mowbray,
Leicestershire**

(SK 72576 12029)

John Thomas



ULAS Report No 2014-187

© ULAS 2014

**An archaeological investigation (test pitting)
inside St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire**

(SP 75276 19029)

John Thomas

For: Buttress Architects Ltd.

Approved by:

Signed: 

Date: 29.10.2014

Name: R.J. Buckley

University of Leicester
Archaeological Services
University Rd., Leicester, LE1 7RH
Tel: (0116) 2522848 Fax: (0116) 2522614

ULAS Report No 2014-187

© ULAS 2014

X.A132.2014

CONTENTS

Summary	1
Introduction	1
Site Location, Geology and Topography	1
Archaeological and Historical Background	1
Archaeological Objectives	2
Methodology	3
Results	4
Discussion	10
Archive	10
Publication	10
Acknowledgements	11
Bibliography	11

FIGURES

Figure 1. Site Location (Taken from OS Landranger Map Sheet 142)	2
Figure 2. Location of St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray (taken from plan supplied by client; not to scale)	3
Figure 3: Plan of St Mary's Church, showing test pit location.	4
Figure 4 Test Hole 1 (below) and general location (right)	4
Figure 5 Test Hole 2 (below) and general location (left)	5
Figure 6 Test Hole 3 (left) and general location (below)	6
Figure 7 Test Hole 4 (below), general location (right) and detail of blue brick foundation (bottom)	7
Figure 8 Test Hole 5 general location (left), detail of foundation (below) and detail of in situ human remains (bottom)	8
Figure 9 Test Hole 6 general location (above left), details of soil layers and human burial (above right) and detail of possible charnel pit (left)	9

TABLES

Table 1: Summary of OASIS information	11
---	----

An archaeological investigation (test pitting) inside St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SP 75276 19029)

John Thomas

Summary

An archaeological investigation (test pitting) was carried out at St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SP 75276 19029) by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) between 15th-17th September 2014. Work was undertaken for Buttress Architects Ltd. in order to provide indications of the character of deposits beneath the floor of the church in order to assist in determining the cause of localised subsidence. Six test pits were hand-excavated in the church floor at various points in the nave, north and south aisles and the north & south transept. Archaeological deposits relating to earlier phases of the churches use, the historic fabric of the church itself and burials within the building were revealed. The test pitting was instructive in highlighting the potential for archaeological survival and the depth at which in situ deposits are located, as well as providing structural information to contribute towards the proposed renovation strategy. The archive will be held by Leicestershire Museum Service under the accession number X.A132.2014.

Introduction

In September 2014 University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological investigation inside St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SP 75276 19029)). The work was undertaken for Buttress Architects Ltd. to provide indications of the character of deposits beneath the floor levels in specific areas of the church. Information from the work could then be used to characterise floor make-up layers, depths of wall foundations and depths of memorial slabs in the areas of excavation. In addition the Test Holes would provide information on the survival and character of any archaeological remains within the church. Archaeological work was carried out between 15th-17th September 2014, by staff of ULAS, on behalf of Buttress Architects Ltd. This report presents the final results of the archaeological investigation.

Site Location, Geology and Topography

Melton Mowbray is located approximately 17 miles from Leicester in the north-east corner of Leicestershire, and is the largest settlement in this part of the county. The parish church of St Mary's is a Grade I listed building situated in the heart of the town centre, to the south of the Market Place and on the western side of Burton Road.

The churchyard lies within the Melton Mowbray Conservation Area at a height of 74m aOD and is located on fairly flat ground, dropping away slightly to the south and east. The British Geological Survey for England and Wales indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of superficial Head deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel overlying Blue Lias Formation Mudstone bedrock <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/GeologyOfBritain/viewer.html>

Archaeological and Historical Background

Melton Mowbray is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 by the name of Medeltune and is described as a thriving market town. The name 'Melton' however, may have derived from either 'Milltown' (as there were two water mills in the area) or 'Middletown' – Melton being central to several hamlets. The Mowbray suffix is taken from Roger de Mowbray who held the manor c.1185.

The town's growth initially resulted from its position at the crossing of the River Eye but during the Medieval period the town prospered from the wool trade. The market, established in 1324, flourished until the 17th century when it went into decline.

In the late 18th century Melton became famous as a centre for foxhunting and as a result several notable hunting lodges, hotels and associated stables were built to cater for the increased population during hunting season.

During the Industrial Revolution a number of industries developed in Melton and following the completion of the Melton Mowbray Navigation Canal in 1795 the town's population expanded rapidly. In the 19th century manufacture of stilton cheese and pork pies, two of the town's most famous products, was well established and important wool and boot & shoe manufacturers were also present.

The English Heritage listing for the parish church, dedicated to St Mary, describes it as a 'Large and impressive church with tall central tower, nave, aisles, chancel and aisled transepts. It has some Norman and earlier 13th century work but most of church is of late 13th century to mid-14th century date. Perpendicular additions are dominant in external views of church. It was once a cell of Lewes Priory and they built the chancel. A fine Perpendicular clerestory carried over nave and chancel. Perpendicular upper stages of tower rest on the earlier

Norman work. There is a good west porch of 14th century date and the north and south entrances are in addition to this. The North vestry is 16th century in date. The church contains the medieval tomb of Lord Mowbray and other monuments of 14th, 15th, 16th and 18th century date. The church was restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott during 1850s.'

The latter phase of work by Scott involved restoration of the window tracery, replacement of the roofs covering the aisles and western porch and the removal of public galleries within the nave. Also within the nave, the entire floor-space was lowered to reveal the bases of the pillars on either side.

This major undertaking is particularly important to the current proposals for developing the church, which involve reversing Scott's work in the nave to restore the floor here to its original level, bringing it back to the floor height of the North and South transept.

Archaeological Objectives

The principle aims of the archaeological excavation were:

- To identify the presence/absence of archaeological deposits
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

In addition information gathered from the Test Holes would help answer structural questions relating to the foundations of various elements of the building, and the present floor of the nave which is unstable.

All archaeological work will be considered in light of the following East Midlands Research Agenda and Strategy topics (Knight *et al.* 2012):

- **HIGH MEDIEVAL (1066-1485): Religion**, 7.5.1. Can we identify additional pre-Conquest church, minster and monastic sites? 7.5.4. Can we shed light on the distribution and development of early churches or chapels and the origins and growth of the parish system.



Figure 1. Site Location (Taken from OS Landranger Map Sheet 142)

Methodology

The work proposed to hand-excavate 6 Test Holes at various designated locations in the church (Figure 3). Existing floor tiles and slabs were removed by building contractors prior to work commencing. Substrata deposits were removed by hand in level by the archaeologists down to the uppermost archaeological deposits or until sufficient depth had been reached to answer the structural questions, depending on which was reached first.

Archaeological deposits encountered were recorded and excavated using standard procedures as outlined in the ULAS recording manual (Beamish 2007), as appropriate to the investigation. Individual descriptions of all archaeological strata and features excavated or exposed was entered onto prepared pro-forma recording sheets where necessary. Field notes were recorded on pro-forma watching brief forms and selected plans/sections were drawn at appropriate scales and tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A photographic record of the excavation was prepared, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered. Colour digital photographs were taken throughout the excavation. The photographic record also included 'working shots' to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (2008) and the *Guidelines for Archaeological Work in Leicestershire and Rutland* (LMARS).

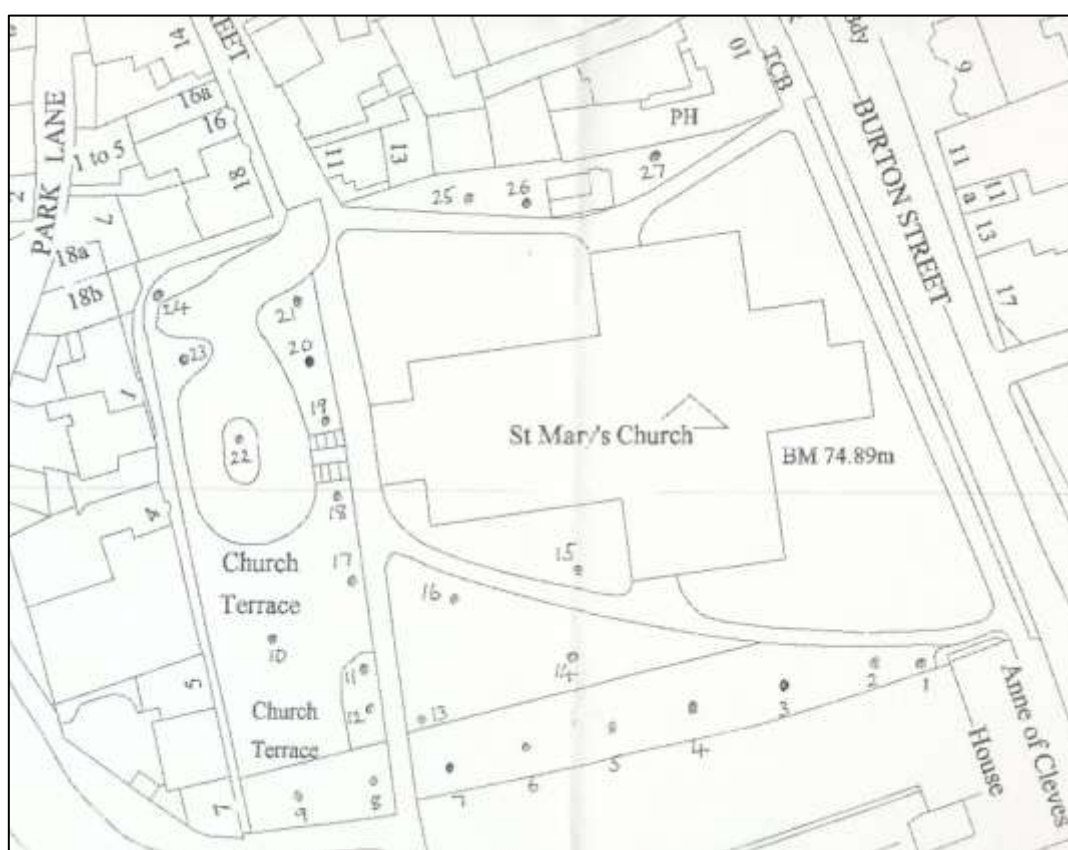


Figure 2. Location of St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray (taken from plan supplied by client; not to scale).

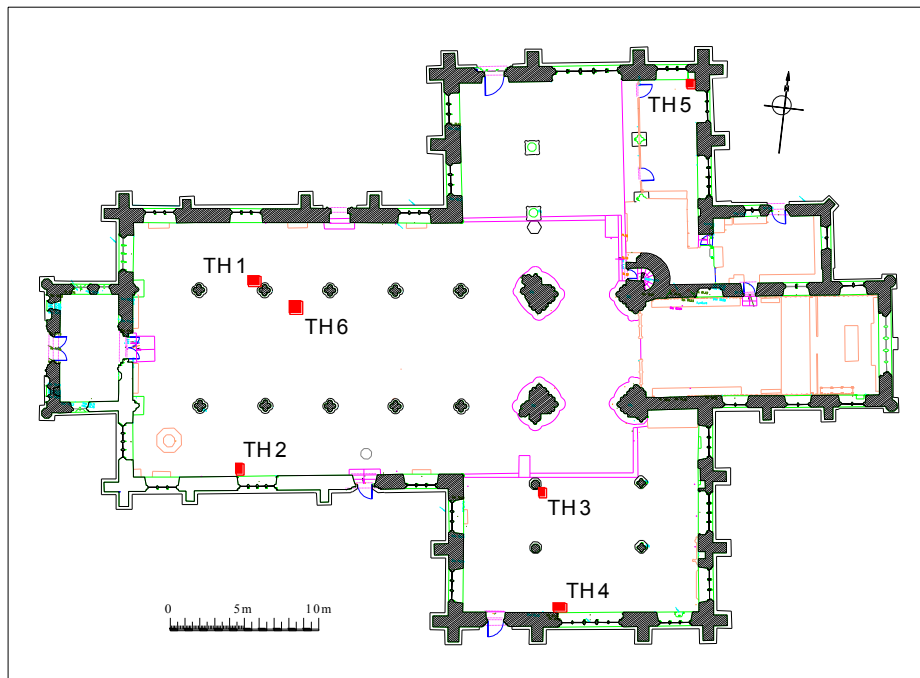


Figure 3: Plan of St Mary's Church, showing test pit location.
(Image supplied by client).

Results

Test Hole 1

Test Hole 1 was located in the North Aisle, adjacent to the second most westerly arcade column, and measured c.0.58m x 0.46m (Figure 4). The excavation revealed that the arcade column sat directly onto the stone floor slab (c.0.07m thick) and this in turn, lay above a second limestone slab (c.0.06m thick), both presumably forming an even footing for the arcade column. Beneath the slabs was a mixed aggregate layer of limestone fragments and larger blocks within a matrix of light greyish brown mortar. A more consistent mortar deposit was revealed in the northern half of the excavated area. Both mortared layers appear to represent part of a supporting pad for the arcade column. During excavation a void appeared running beneath the column but the full scale of this hole was not able to be seen.

Figure 4 Test Hole 1 (below) and general location (right)



Test Hole 2

Test Hole 2 was located against the southern wall of the church in the South Aisle and was located to provide an indication of the wall foundation depth (Figure 5). The Test Hole measured *c.* 1.10m x 0.56m and was between 0.12m and 0.45m deep.

Beneath the current floor, a levelling layer of loose, light yellowish brown mortar (between 0.08m – 0.12m thick) was revealed. This overlay a mixed deposit of mid to dark greyish brown silty clay containing mortar flecks, brick/tile fragments, human bone fragments and stone pebbles. Within the confines of the Test Hole it was difficult to be too interpretive about what this layer represented but it seems likely to have been either a levelling layer supporting the floor, or infill of a construction trench for the church wall.

The stone wall foundation stepped out by approximately 0.20m at a depth of *c.* 0.12m beneath the current floor level. The foundation consisted of a well-laid mix of ironstone and limestone blocks with occasional sandstone pieces, all bonded with a loose, silty sand mortar. A smaller sondage excavated against the wall foundation in the eastern end of the Test Hole revealed at least four courses of stonework, up to 0.30m deep however the full depth of the construction was not revealed.



Figure 5 Test Hole 2 (below) and general location (left)



Test Hole 3

Test Hole 3 was located against the base of the north-western column in the South Transept and measured approximately 1.08m x 0.63m x up to 0.28m deep (Figure 6). As with Test Hole 1 it was found that the column base was located directly onto the stone floor slab (c.0.07m thick) of the South Transept. Below the floor slab was a c.0.10 - 0.15m thick layer of loose and friable, greyish brown silty sandy clay mixed with mortar fragments. Underneath this was what appeared to be the south-east corner of a mortared stone pad below the column. This was similar to the deposits revealed in Test Hole 1, consisting of mixed limestone and ironstone blocks cemented together with greyish brown mortar. Clear edges to this deposit were revealed on the eastern and south sides of the test pit, suggesting that a roughly square pad of this material lies beneath this column base.



Figure 6 Test Hole 3 (left) and general location (below)



Test Hole 4

Test Hole 4 lay against the southern wall of the South Transept and measured c. 1.07m x 0.60m x between 0.30m – 0.48m deep (Figure 7). The main purpose of this excavation was to determine the depth of the wall foundation in this part of the church.

The stone footings of the wall continued below the level of the current floor for approximately 0.20m. Beneath the stone at least three stepped courses of blue brick were encountered, presumably relating to a later phase of underpinning. A deeper sondage in the northern part of the Test Hole showed that the brick footings carried on further than the 0.58m that was reached.

To the north of the wall footings a series of layered and intercutting deposits including possible cobbled surfaces and grave cuts may have represented *in situ* archaeological remains relating to earlier phases of the church. Within the confines of the Test Hole however, it was difficult to suggest more than this.

Figure 7 Test Hole 4 (below), general location (right) and detail of blue brick foundation (bottom)



Test Hole 5

Test Hole 5 was located in the north-east corner of the church, in the Clergy & Wardens Vestry and measured c.1.08m x 0.42m x up to 0.40m deep (Figure 8). Some disturbance in the extreme NE corner had been caused by installation of a service pipe but the southerly 0.80m was adequate to reveal what lay beneath the floor and show the foundations to the wall in this area.

Below the stone floor slabs in this room was a c.0.30m thick layer of very loose, mid greyish-brown silty sandy clay. Below this depth the soil became more compact for the next c.0.10m that was revealed. Within the firmer soil on the western side of the excavated area a human skull was revealed that may have been *in situ*. Although slightly disturbed the skull was facing eastwards and had its lower jaw present, suggesting it had not been moved. It is possible that this represents an earlier burial that had been truncated by the construction of the eastern church wall.

The excavation revealed stone wall footings below the floor level to the full depth of the Test Hole, indicating that the wall foundations carried on beyond the depth of the Test Hole. The soil nearest to the wall footings maintained a fairly loose consistency for the full depth of the excavation, which may coincide with a construction trench for the eastern wall of the church, but this was not entirely clear



Figure 8 Test Hole 5 general location (left), detail of foundation (below) and detail of in situ human remains (bottom)



Test Hole 6

Test Hole 6 was located on the northern side of the Nave, between the second and third arcade columns from the west and measured *c.* 1m x 1m x 0.44m deep (Figure 9). The location of this excavation was intended to examine the cause of floor sinking in this part of the church.

Below the current floor tiles was a mixed aggregate make-up layer of light yellowish brown mortar, limestone & slate fragments (*c.* 0.20m thick). Underneath this the remainder of the trench consisted of a mixed 'fill' layer of mid greyish-brown silty sandy clay (*c.* 0.44m thick) containing loose human bone, two ceramic floor tiles and a fragment of stained window glass. Disturbed human remains lying in the centre of the Test Hole probably represent an *in situ* burial that was affected by the earlier phase of floor lowering. To either side of this were looser areas, possibly indicating filled pits. At least one of these had been used to re-bury loose human bones (charnel), presumably also disturbed during the lowering of the floor in the 19th century.

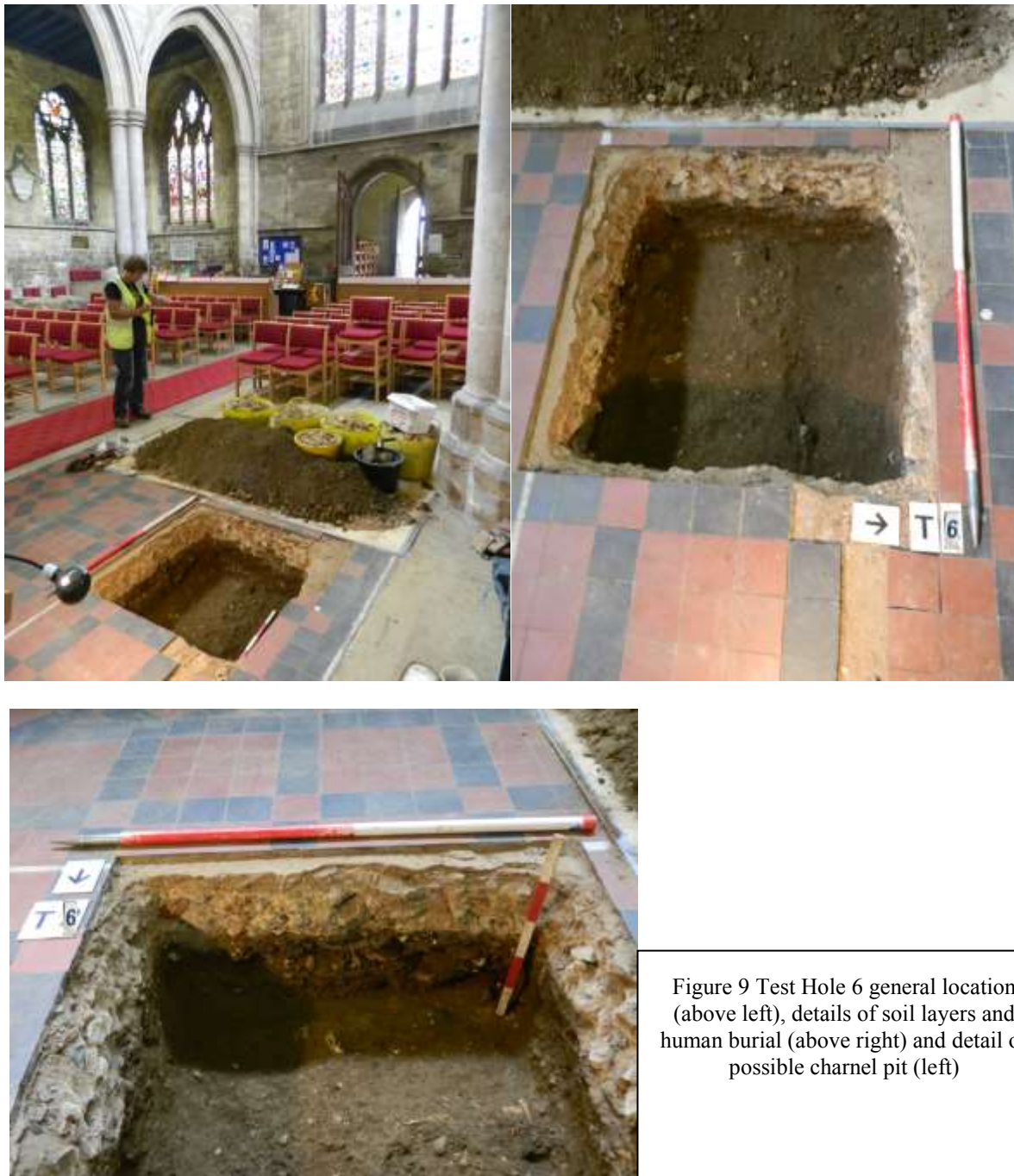


Figure 9 Test Hole 6 general location (above left), details of soil layers and human burial (above right) and detail of possible charnel pit (left)

Discussion

The main aims of the archaeological investigation were to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the church and provide information about structural aspects in different areas of the building.

Archaeological remains were encountered in all of the Test Holes, although within the close confines of the excavations interpretations were limited.

Test Holes 1 and 3 revealed mortared stone pads acting as solid foundations for the associated columns that sat above them. It seems likely that these are medieval in date, relating to the construction of the nave in the early 14th century and the south transept in the later 13th century. In both cases the pillar base was found to be placed directly onto the stone floor slab. The lowering of the nave floor in 1850 will have revealed this lower part of the column.

Wall foundations of the church were examined in Test Holes 2, 4 and 5. Stone wall footings were revealed in TH 2 in the south aisle, where stepped foundations were observed, and in TH 5. Both of these appear to be original stone footings. In TH 4, adjacent to the southern wall of the south transept, brick footings were uncovered. These were clearly a later addition and presumably relate to an episode of underpinning in 19th century, perhaps part of the work undertaken by G.G. Scott, which included the transepts, between 1865-9 (Pevsner 1984, 318).

Archaeological layers were also revealed in these Test Holes. The deposits recorded in TH 2 may relate to backfilling of a construction trench for the wall, however those revealed in TH 4 included laid cobbles that might relate to an external surface prior to the construction of the south transept. This possible surface was cut through by later features that were possibly graves. A probable *in situ* human skull was found in TH 5 indicating that the wall of the north transept had truncated an earlier burial, which must date to pre c.1330

Finally Test Hole 6, in the nave, revealed archaeological layers approximately 0.40m below the present floor level. *In situ* human remains, although slightly disturbed as a result of the 1850 floor lowering, provided an indication that further burials may have survived the Victorian renovation at a relatively shallow depth. Probable charnel pits to either side of the burial however, also indicate that some graves will have been disturbed during the renovation, and the bones re-interred within the purposefully dug pits.

No evidence of subsidence in the substrata was observed in this area and the layer of hardcore beneath the floor appeared compact and stable. It is possible that the cause of the structural damage was damp getting between the floor tiles and underlying hardcore, and lifting the tiles up, or that the tiles were laid too tightly together with little room for flexibility.

Archive

The site archive consists of 6 pro-forma ULAS Trench Recording sheets providing details of all test pits, 1 A3 sheet of permagraph containing 3 scaled drawings, 43 digital photographs. The archive will be held by Leicestershire Museum Service under the accession number X.A132.2014.

Publication

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work to the *Online AccesS to the Index of archaeological investigationS* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) at the University of York (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of OASIS information

Project OASIS no.	universal- 199315
Project Name	St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray
Project Type	Test pit evaluation
Project Manager	Richard Buckley
Project Supervisor	John Thomas
Previous/Future work	None/unknown
Current Land Use	Religious building
Development Type	Proposed renovation of floor within Listed Building
Reason for Investigation	
Position in the Planning Process	-
Site Co-ordinates	SK 75276 19029
Start/end dates of field work	15-17 September 2014
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire Museum Service
Study Area	6 Test Pits equal to c. 3.64 sq m

A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in the local archaeological journal, the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, in due course.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to the client, Melton Mowbray PCC for their co-operation and assistance on site. Fieldwork was undertaken by John Thomas and Sue Henderson, the report was written by Mathew Morris and the project was managed for ULAS by Richard Buckley.

Bibliography

- Clarke, S. 2013 *St. Mary's Parish Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SK 75276 19029): Archaeological Desk-based Assessment and Statement of Significance*. Unpublished ULAS Report No. 2013-144.
- Pevsner, N. 1984 *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland*. 2nd Edition. Penguin Books.

John Thomas
University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS)
School of Archaeology and Ancient History
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH

Tel: 0116 252 5038
Fax: 0116 252 2614
Email: jst6@leicester.ac.uk

29-09-2014

Contact Details

Richard Buckley or Patrick Clay
University of Leicester Archaeological
Services (ULAS)
University of Leicester,
University Road,
Leicester LE1 7RH

T: +44 (0)116 252 2848

F: +44 (0)116 252 2614

E: ulas@le.ac.uk

W: www.le.ac.uk/ulas



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



THE Awards Winner
2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013