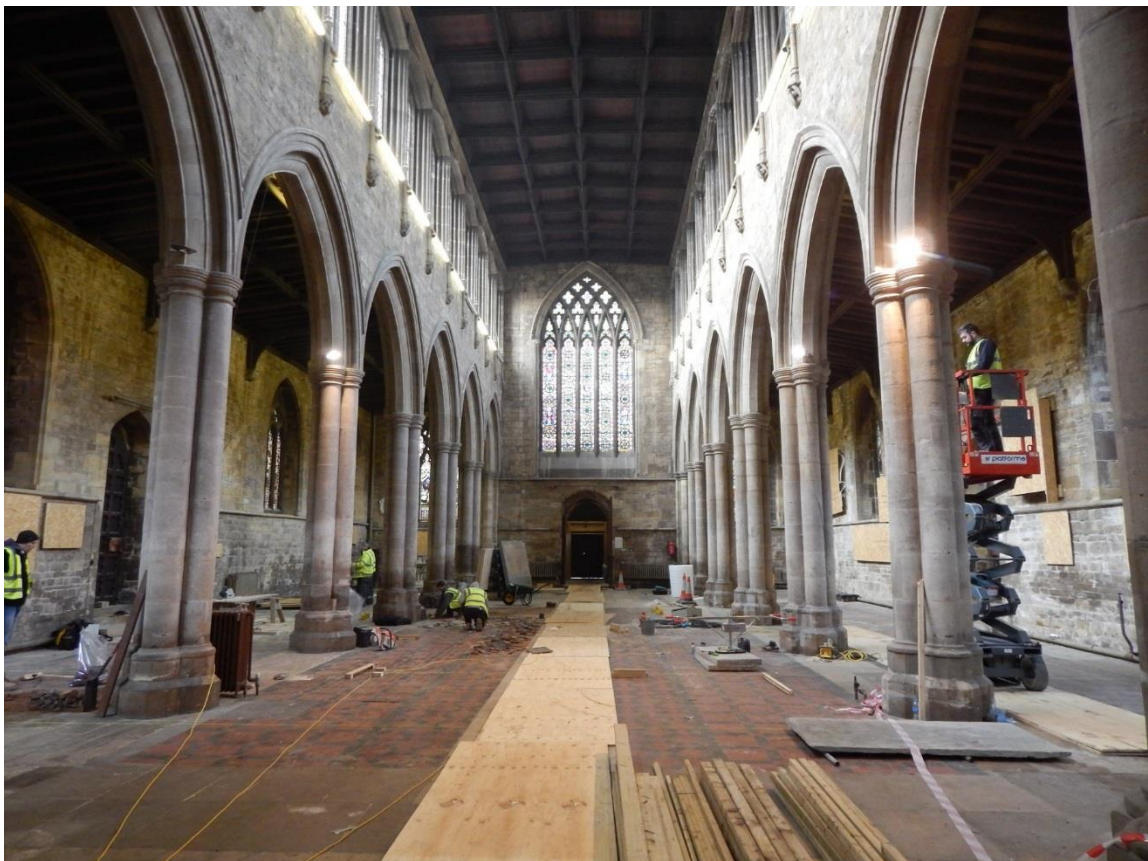


Archaeological attendance
during groundworks at
St. Mary's Church,
Melton Mowbray,
Leicestershire
(SP 75276 19029)

Leon Hunt



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for

St. Mary's Church Melton Mowbray Development C.I.O

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Archaeological attendance during groundworks at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SP 75276 19029)

Leon Hunt

Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) were commissioned by St. Mary's Church Melton Mowbray Development C.I.O to carry out archaeological work during ground-works at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SP 75276 19029).

The floor of the church, which was lowered in the 1850s, was to be restored to its original level. This would necessitate work to remove the ledgers and floor slabs in the church and reduce all the floor levels, in both the nave and transepts, to accommodate make up layers for the new floor and under floor heating.

The work follows on from a small-scale test pit evaluation carried out by ULAS in 2014 that revealed archaeological deposits relating to earlier phases of the churches use, the historic fabric of the church itself and burials.

As the nave floor had been lowered previously during the 1850s during restoration work, much of the deposits below the floor of the nave had been disturbed before. However, the transepts' floor had not been lowered and still contained a large number of intact 18th-19th century brick chambers containing human remains, along with a number of lead coffins not within brick chambers.

The chambers were emptied of soil and inhumation remains prior to their destruction to a depth just below the finished make-up level for the new flooring. The lead coffins were mostly below the finished floor level and were left intact in situ.

The human remains within the chambers mainly consisted of disarticulated bones most likely the charnel remains of former burials within the church, disturbed by the later inhumations.

Three of the brick chambers were vaulted and sealed. These had to be removed to facilitate the reduction of the ground level. One contained a wooden coffin, one a lead coffin and one was not fully investigated. The coffins lay below the level of the floor make-up layers and were not removed.

Two further graves consisted of larger brick tombs. One contained a single damaged lead coffin, the other was sealed under brick and stone and contained a multi-shelled coffin of wood and lead, with a cloth covering and depositum plate. This coffin, despite being below the make-up level for the new floor remained in situ.

The watching brief also revealed the unpinning of the southern transept wall in new brick and the damage done to the foundations of the pillars during the floor lowering in the 1850s.

The watching brief has allowed a glimpse into the nature of belief and burial practices during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Introduction

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) were commissioned by St. Mary's Church Melton Mowbray Development C.I.O to carry out archaeological work during ground-works at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 75276 19029).

It was proposed that the nave floor, which was lowered in the 1850s, should be restored to its original level. This would necessitate work to remove the ledgers and floor slabs in the church and reduce all the floor levels to accommodate make up layers for the new floor and under floor heating.

The Diocesan Advisory Council (DAC) has granted a faculty for work with a condition that no works should take place until the Parochial Church Council (PCC), after consultation with the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.

A previous test pit evaluation carried out by ULAS in 2014 revealed archaeological deposits relating to earlier phases of the churches use, the historic fabric of the church itself and burials within the building.

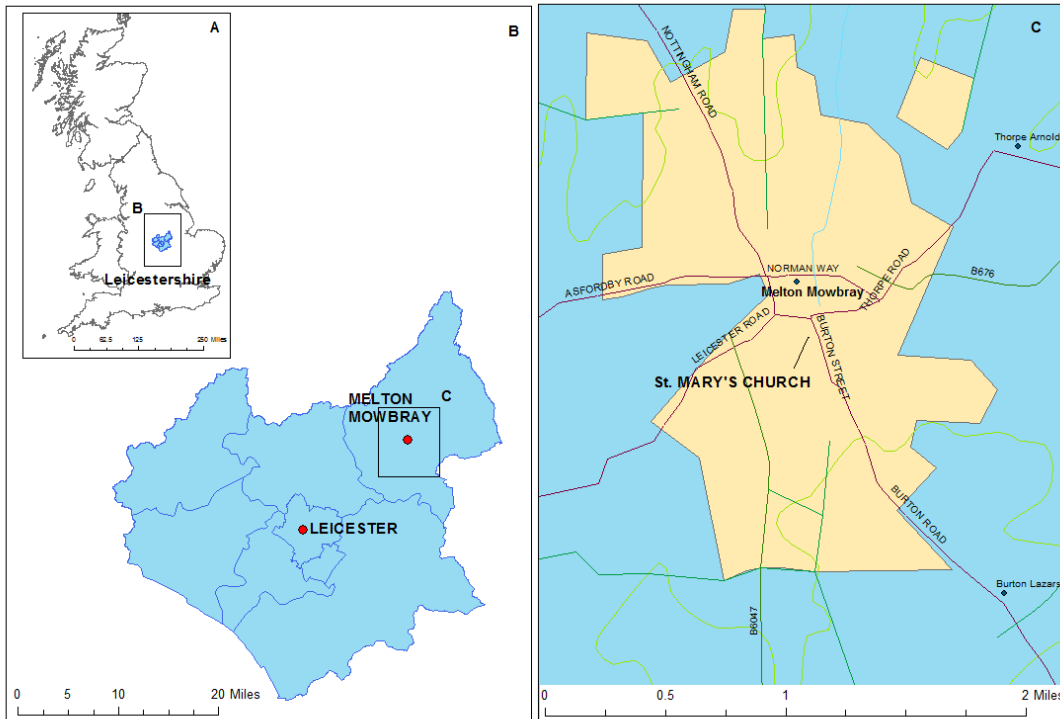


Figure 1: Site Location

Location and Geology

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 (Figure 1). 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 (Figure 2).

Historical and Archaeological Background

A desk-based assessment had been prepared for the proposal (Clarke 2013). The Historic England 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.

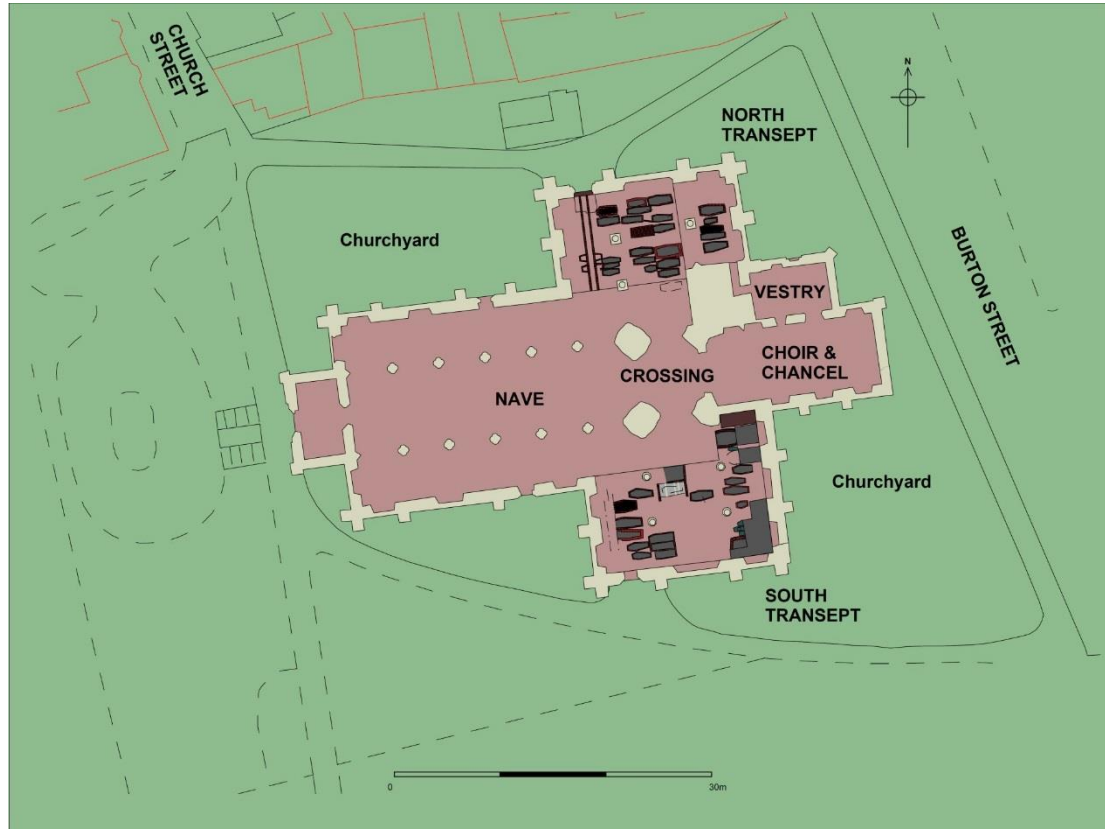


Figure 2: Plan of St. Mary's church

A test-pit evaluation has been undertaken (Thomas 2014). The work was carried out 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.

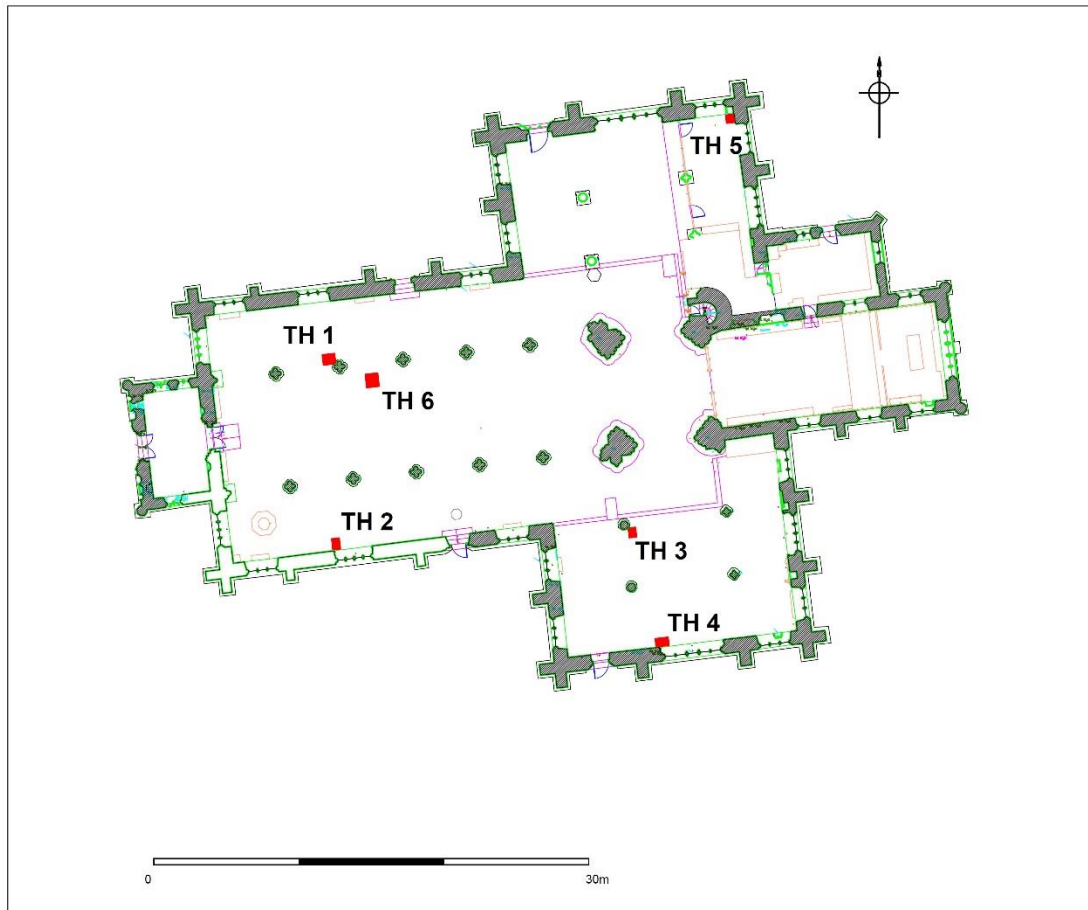


Figure 3: Location of evaluation test holes

Archaeological Objectives

The main objective of the archaeological excavation is to determine and understand the nature, function and character of any significant archaeology on the site in its cultural and environmental setting.

The aims of the Watching brief are:

- To identify the presence/absence of any 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.

Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* (rev. 2014) and adhered to their *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (rev. 2014).

A Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Work was produced by ULAS prior to the archaeological work being undertaken (ULAS 2016).

The project involved the supervision of overburden removal and other groundworks by an experienced professional archaeologist during the works.

The work was carried out by a mini digger fitted with a ditching bucket, except when removing stone or brick work where a toothed bucket or pecker was employed.

The ledger stones and floor slabs within the nave, along with most of the nave floor tiles had been removed after the initial visit of the archaeologist. The slabs and ledgers within the transepts and crossing place were removed under supervision as these areas were more sensitive.

After this the machine was employed to reduce the ground levels after the archaeological remains had been excavated and recorded.



Figure 4: Ledgers removed over heating system in north transept, looking north

Results

An initial visit was undertaken on 23rd January 2017. Prior to the visit some of the ledgers and slabs in the north transept had been removed by an environmental services team who were to remove asbestos associated with the under floor heating system here. This had exposed the brick lined chamber running north to south, around 12m long and 0.78m deep, in which the heating pipes were laid (Figure 4). Damaged brick-lined graves could be seen each side off the brick chamber lying east to west. This area remained largely out of bounds during the work due to the presence of the asbestos, which could not be disturbed.

The site was not visited again until most of the floor slabs and ledgers within the nave had been catalogued and work had begun on removing the flooring in the south transept.

The church was visited on the 8th February 2017 when work began on reducing the levels over the nave area of the church. Around 0.20m of overburden was removed including patches of cement and concrete plus the upper soil deposits here of brownish yellow sandy silt. There were a few soft areas and hollows observed across the area, which were clearly the remains of graves, but these incurred minimal disturbance from the machine and only a few pieces of charnel, including skulls and long-bones were retrieved for reburial. After the ground levels were reduced to the required depth the area was levelled, often using spoil from other areas and compacted.



Figure 5: Work in progress within the nave, south aisle, looking east

After the removal of the floor slabs and ledgers in the south transept it was clear that the graves here were largely intact as the floor levels of the transept were around 0.30m above the floor level of the nave and had not been disturbed by the reduction of the level of the floor by Scott in the 1850s (Figures 7 & 8).

The graves were brick lined and broadly under the ledger stones that appeared to correspond to them. However, it was clear that the upper grave soils within the grave chambers contained a large amount of human remains that would be disturbed by the reduction of the ground level here to a depth of around 0.40m to 0.50m. Therefore, each brick-lined grave was excavated to a depth of around 0.50m and the remains collected for reburial. The brick chambers were cleaned, photographed and a record made of their dimensions.

These excavations were carried out between 8th February and 1st March 2017 by a team of 2-4 archaeologists.



Figure 6: The north aisle after the reduction and compaction of the soils, looking east



Figure 7: South transept after removal of ledgers and slabs

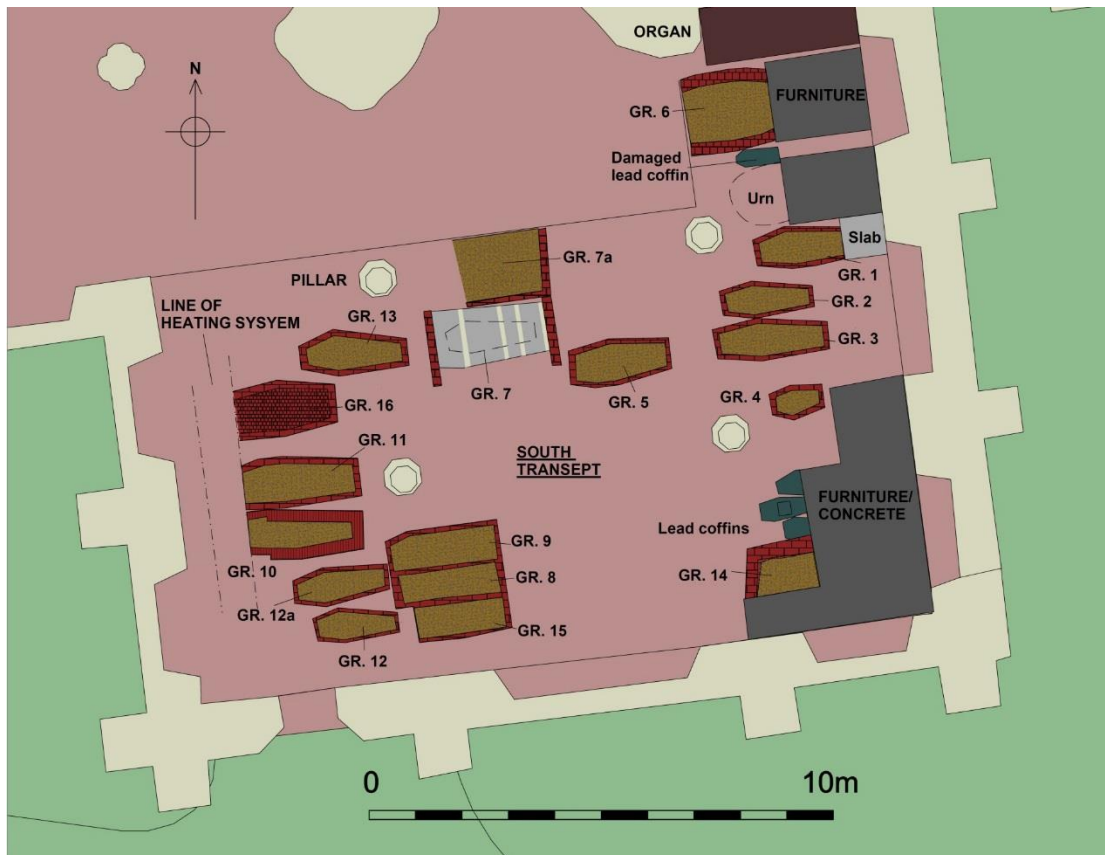


Figure 8: Plan of south transept showing position of brick-lined graves

South Transept

At the time of the excavation of the graves in the south transept many of the slabs and ledgers had been removed, and this revealed a 0.10m – 0.15m layer of yellowish brown sandy silt and large patches of reddish brown sand. There were several pieces of church furniture in the south transept along the east wall, which had been boxed to protect them. Some ledgers and slabs also remained along with some sections of concrete.

Some graves could be identified on the surface whereas others required the removal of around 0.10m of the soil to expose their upper courses. Some graves were at a slightly lower level to these and were not exposed until the area was reduced by machine. In most of these cases the bones were merely retrieved and the grave quickly photographed before destruction.

At the eastern end of the transept was a group of four brick-lined graves (Gr. 1-4), with Grave 1 partially obscured by a slab. All the graves were 'single-break' coffin shaped with Graves 1 and 3 of a similar size (approximately 2.4m by 0.80m) (Figure 9). Grave 2 was slightly smaller (2m by 0.70m), whereas Grave 4 was clearly a child's grave measuring only 1m by 0.70m (Figure 10). The ledgers across this section of the floor were associated with former vicar Thomas Middleton and his wife Dorothy (died 1811) and children, including Maria Middleton who died aged 38 days (d.1798).



Figure 9: Work in progress on brick-lined graves (Gr 1-4), south transept

The soil within the graves was loose sandy silt with patches of clay with pieces of slate, brick, mortar, and disarticulated human remains, which were clearly charnel as they mainly consisted on long-bones and skulls, with Grave 2 containing at least 4 complete femurs and Grave 4 containing only adult remains. The remains of a wooden coffin

were identified at 0.5m depth in Grave 3. Some contained the remains of coffin handles and nails.



Figure 10: Grave 4, post excavation, looking west



Figure 11: Vaulted feature (Gr. 6), looking east

To the north of Graves 1-4 a ledger had been removed belonging to Harold Barker who died in 1968. Below the ledger was an urn of ashes, which was retrieved for reburial.

Later during the stripping of this area by machine a damaged lead coffin was revealed just below the surface to the north of the urn pit.

Further to the north of the urn was a brick lined feature that appeared to be part of a damaged vaulted grave (Gr. 6), slightly obscured by the furniture to the east. The visible areas of the feature measured 1.8m by 1.8m and although the feature contained similar soil to the other graves it contained fewer human remains and considerably more brick and stone (Figure 11). A similar feature (Gr. 14) lay around 9m to the south at the opposite end of the south transept, although this was mainly obscured by remaining ledgers and concrete here.

While this area was being cleaned prior to being photographed, three lead coffins were exposed, partially obscured by the remaining ledgers and slabs here (Figure 12). Although below the finished working level, they were cleaned and photographed and will remain in situ.

One bore the following inscription:

Major George Bennet
Died March the 26th
1738
In the 57th year of his age



Figure 12: Partially obscured lead coffins, looking east.



Figure 13: Typical coursing within brick lined graves in south transept (Gr. 5)



Figure 14: Work in progress lifting slabs over Grave 7, looking north-west

A further single brick-lined grave (Gr. 5) lay to the west of Graves 1-4 under the ledger of Penelope Grant and Mary Treadwell. This was of similar size to Graves 1 & 3 (albeit a little wider) and also contained a considerable amount of charnel, mainly segments of long bones (Figure 13).

Much of the central area of the south transept did not contain any features. However, to the north-west of Grave 5 just below the finished working level were four mortared slate slabs. The slabs were lifted to reveal a large brick lined and white washed chamber measuring around 2.4m by 1.2m and around 1m deep (Figure 14). A damaged lead coffin lay submerged by ground water at the base.

To the immediate north of Grave 7 was a brick edged feature, presumably a further brick-lined grave (Gr. 7a). This measured around 1.4m by 1.8m but was not excavated as it lay below the finished working level.

The chamber (Gr. 7) had lain under a ledger for Richard Innett (son of Richard Innett). There were four further ledgers arranged to the south of this grave, where there were no inhumations, suggesting that the entire family group of Richard Innett, Elizabeth and son, may be within this larger chamber and possibly the grave to the north (Gr. 7a). The coffin within Grave 7 also lay below the finished ground level and so this chamber will be in-filled and left in situ.

The western side of the south transept contained a further nine brick-lined graves. Four of these were of the typical single break shape (Graves 10-12, 12a, 13 and 16), whereas three were broadly rectangular and co-joined (Graves 8, 9 and 15) (Figure 15). Most contained at least some charnel remains, although generally fewer remains than in the eastern group, with the occasional nail or piece of coffin furniture. Often the soils would be more clayey in composition (this was particularly apparent in Graves 8, 9 and 15), which may be due to a high water table here or localised flooding from a leaking roof.

Two graves were not discovered until the area was in the process of being stripped (Graves 12a and 16) and were damaged before they could be properly recorded as a consequence. Grave 16 was brick vaulted.

Graves 10, 11 and 16 had been damaged along their western edges by the brick-lined heating system that passed through the transept at the western end from north to south.

Grave 10 was of a slightly different construction to the rest of the graves here, having the upper course aligned perpendicular to the lower courses.

Most of the graves were broadly positioned under ledger stones, although many in the group here were unreadable. Those that were legible included the Healey and Abington families, plus Ann Grant and Jane Hubbard.

The reduction of the surface here to the required level by machine followed the recording of the brick lined graves within the south transept. The machining revealed the lead coffin close to Grave 6, plus Grave 12a and Grave 16. The foundations of the four pillars within the south transept were also revealed. The foundations consisted of rough limestone blocks of various sizes. This confirms the evidence from Test Hole 3 of the evaluation (Thomas 2014). The pillar at the north-western edge of the south transept had been truncated and undermined along the northern edge where the floor level had been lowered in the nave (Figure 16).

The ground reduction in the south transept also revealed that the south wall of the transept had been underpinned with blue bricks at some time. This also confirms the evidence from Test Hole 4 excavated during the evaluation (Figure 17).



Figure 15: Graves 8 & 9, post excavation, looking west.
Grave 15 lay under debris to the south



Figure 16: Damaged pillar foundation in south transept, looking south



Figure 17: Blue bricks underpinning south wall of south transept, looking south-west



Figure 18: The south transept area after stripping and compacting, looking north-west

After the south transept area had been reduced the ground was compacted to the required level (Figure 18).



Figure 19: Plan of north transept showing position of brick lined graves

North Transept

From 16th February 2017 the ledgers and slabs were lifted on the north transept including those within the warden's office that lies on the eastern side of the transept (Figure 19). The floor here was around 0.20m higher than the rest of the transept and so any graves exposed here had to be excavated to a depth of around 0.70m and the human remains within them were collected for reburial. The screen that lay between the warden's office and the rest of the transept had been removed prior to the lifting of the slabs.

Warden's office (eastern group)

The removal of the six ledgers within the warden's office revealed five brick lined graves within this area. These graves (Graves 17-21) were all slightly different to one another, although all had been white-washed on their inner surfaces. Grave 17 was more trapezoid in shape, measuring 2.4m by 0.90m, and was stepped at around 7 courses along the southern side, possibly evidence that the grave was constructed on top of an earlier chamber. A large amount of wooden coffin pieces were retrieved from the soil within Grave 17 along with charnel and a coffin handle.

Graves 18 and 19 were both single break coffin shaped and were of similar size (2.2m – 2.3m by 0.7m), although the hole of Grave 18 itself was quite narrow. The pair overlapped at the western end and may have been constructed together.



Figure 20: Graves 17-20, with Grave 19 prior to removal of vaulting, looking south-west



Figure 21: Grave 19 after removal of vaulting showing coffin pieces in situ

Grave 19 was brick vaulted and sealed at the time of excavation (Figure 20). As the vaulting lay above the finished ground level the vaulting was removed to make sure the contents would not be disturbed by the subsequent lowering of the ground level.

Within the chamber was a rotted wooden coffin (Figure 21), and a number of pieces of wood that had been used to provide a support or 'centre' for when the brick vaulting had been constructed (Figure 22). As the coffin lay below the finished ground level it was not disturbed and the grave was subsequently filled in during machining.



Figure 22: Wooden 'centre' for vaulting retrieved from Grave 19

Grave 20 was of a small, child sized grave measuring only 1.3m by 0.6m, whereas Grave 21 was one of the largest in the church measuring 2.5m by 1.1m. Grave 21 also had a ledge under the third course of bricks on the north and south sides of the chamber and had a wide base. All the graves, apart from Grave 19, contained charnel remains, although they were largely empty of soil within the upper parts of the chamber and so fewer buried remains were collected. Significantly, the smallest grave (Grave 20) contained four adult skulls.

Northern Group

The graves within the main part of the north transept could be divided into three groups, with a group of nine on the northern part of the transept, a group of six to the south and a small group of three, plus a few damaged graves to the south-west.

All the graves, apart from the sealed ones, contained varying amounts of charnel.

The northern group consisted of seven similar brick lined graves (Graves 22-27 & 29), of similar size and shape, although each were slightly different in design and dimension, with the largest (Grave 22) measuring 2.3m by 1m and smallest (Grave 24) measuring 1.7m by 0.9m. Grave 23 was similar to Grave 10 within the south transept in that the

upper course was lain perpendicular to the lower courses. This upper course also lay over the upper course of Grave 26, which lay to the direct south (Figure 23).



Figure 23: Post excavation shot of Graves 26 and 23, with top course of Grave 23 removed



Figure 24: Grave 28 with vaulted cover

There appeared to be a further grave (Grave 30) between Grave 24 and 27, but further excavation revealed that there was simply a course of bricks linking the two graves

between top and base at this point. Whether there is some significance to this as they are part of a family group or merely part of a damaged grave is unclear. The ledgers over Graves 22, 24 and 25 are mainly of the Garner family, but others here are unreadable.



Figure 25: Work in progress on Grave 28, looking west

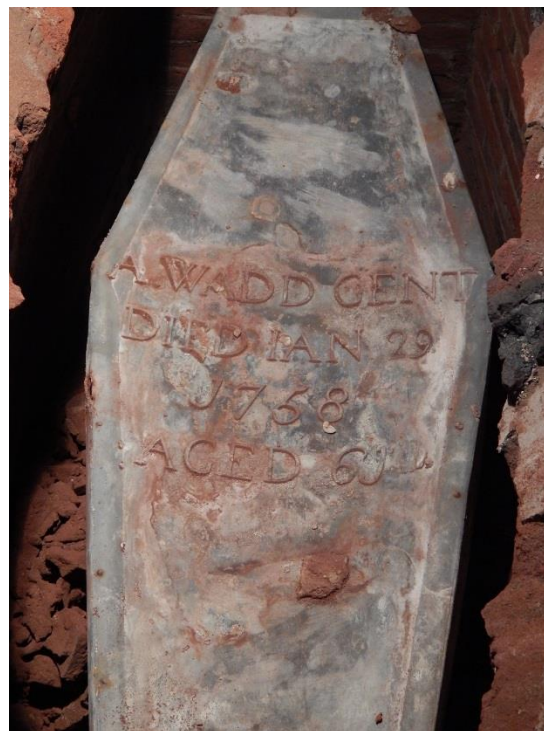


Figure 26: Lead coffin within Grave 28, looking west

Close to the north door of the north transept was a further intact vaulted grave (Grave 28), similar in design to Grave 19 within the warden's office, but with more of a dome shape to the vaulting (Figure 24). With the vaulting lying above the finished level the

brickwork had to be removed and this was undertaken by the groundworkers employing a large drill to break the brick-work and mortar (Figure 25).

Within the grave lay a lead coffin of single-break design with an inscription soldered onto the upper surface at chest height (Figure 26).

The inscription was as follows:

*A.WADD. GENT
DIED JAN 29
1758
AGED 69*

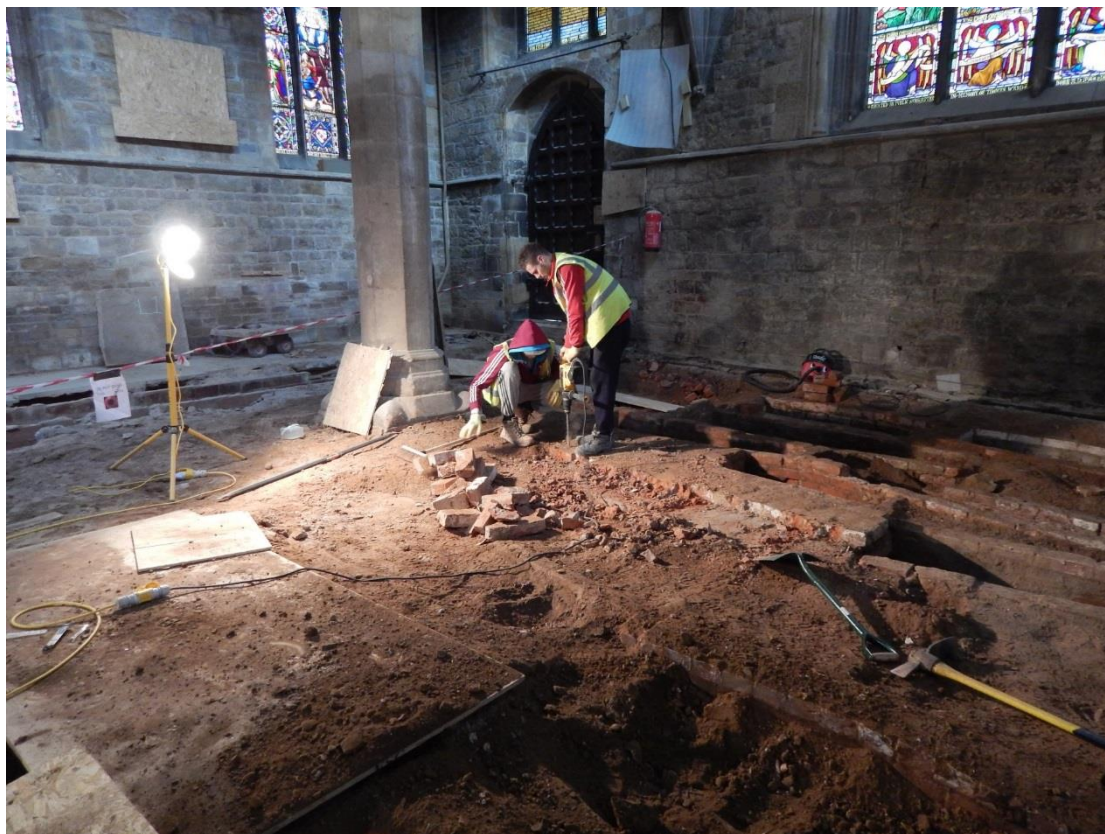


Figure 27: Work in progress on Grave 31, looking north-west

The inhumation is that of Anthony Wadd, a gentleman of Melton Mowbray. On the north wall of the transept above the grave is a plaque commemorating A. Wadd, although this not visible during the watching brief as it had been covered in wood to protect it prior to the ground-works being undertaken.

The north transept had contained a large dark slate ledger positioned almost centrally within the floor area that contained inscriptions to the Neale and Wartnaby family, with dates ranging from 1822-1855. Beneath this ledger under a thin layer of sandy silt was a rectangular area of brick measuring 2.2m by 1m. The bricks were only a layer thick but a test hole dug through the brick with a mattock revealed stone below.

A drill was employed to break up the brickwork, revealing four slate slabs of similar size and thickness to those over the large chamber in the south transept (Grave 7) (Figure 27). The removal of these revealed a wood and velvet covered coffin around 30mm below the surface, within a rectangular brick lined grave (Grave 31) (Figure 28).



Figure 28: Work in progress cleaning up coffin within Grave 31, looking west

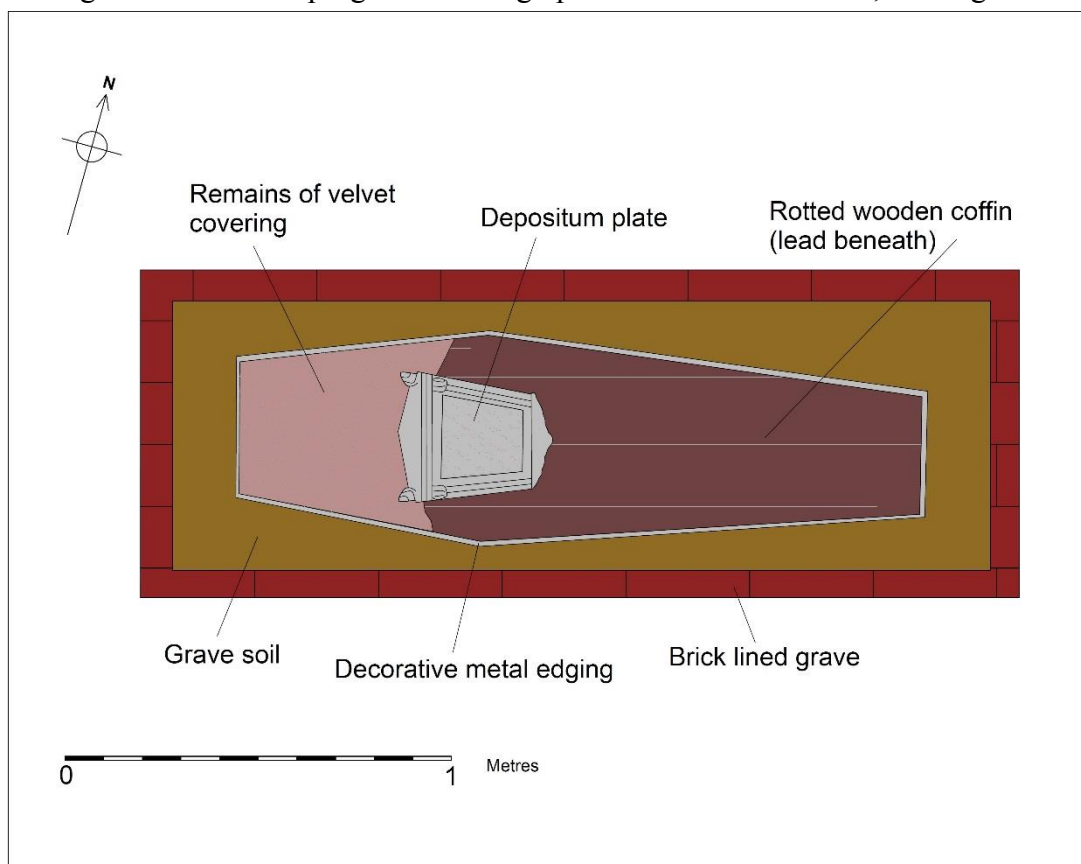


Figure 29: Plan of Grave 31



Figure 30: Detail of front of coffin, showing velvet, eroded escutcheons and rusted depositum plate



Figure 31: Lead coffin within Grave 31

The coffin was revealed as multiple shelled, with a rotted wooden coffin covering a lead coffin within (Figure 29). The front of the coffin was covered in velvet, which had largely rotted away. Rusted tin (?) escutcheons fixed the velvet in place at the edges of the coffin and the chest area was decorated with a rusted tin depositum plate, which could not be read (Figure 30).

The lead coffin beneath the rotted wood appeared intact and unadorned (Figure 31). A test area was excavated to below the depth of the coffin and revealed that the coffin sat upon a further stone slab, most likely the cover of a further burial below.

The lead coffin within Grave 30 lay just about the finished level, but it was decided that it should be kept in situ and not removed.



Figure 32: The northern group within the north transept, post-excavation, looking west



Figure 33: Graves 32 and 33, post excavation, looking east

Southern group

To the south of Grave 31 were a group of six brick lined graves of variable size (Graves 32-35, 39 & 40). All were single-break coffin shaped and of similar build, except Grave 32, which was quite large and wide and similar to Grave 21. This grave also had the upper course lain perpendicular over the top of its neighbour Grave 33, as in Graves 23 and 26 (Figure 32).

Grave 40 was also different as it was much smaller than the others, measuring only 1.1m by 0.7m and clearly a child's grave. The ledgers here were almost directly over the associated graves below, but were mostly unreadable except John Clarkson (d. 1769) and Elizabeth wife of William (?), which covered Grave 34 and 39 respectively.

The group of graves contained little soil in the upper part of the chambers and so fewer human remains were collected for reburial compared to those graves to the north and east.



Figure 34: The southern group in the north transept, post excavation, looking south-west

As the slabs and ledgers were cleared from the crossing place to the south of the north transept, a further brick lined grave was revealed just under the floor level here. This was not excavated as it lay just under the finished level.

South-west group

A group of three small graves under the ledgers associated with the Whitchurch family, were located between the two pillars at the western side of the north transept (Graves 36-38). They varied between 1.7m by 0.5m to 1.4m by 0.5m and were broadly the same shape, except that Grave 38 had been built abutting Grave 37 so closely that the grave space itself was narrowed as a consequence. A small amount of charnel was recovered from the graves. To the direct west of these three small graves were two adult graves, which had been damaged by the brick lined heating system along the western edge of the north transept. There may have been further graves in this area but the proximity of the asbestos within the heating system meant that this area could not be fully investigated.



Figure 35: Three small graves at western end of north transept (Graves 36-38), with damaged graves and heating system, looking south-east

After all the brick-lined graves had been recorded the ground within the north transept was reduced to the finished level by between 0.30m - 0.50m. All the upper portions of the brick lined graves were destroyed apart from Graves 28 and 31, which are to be protected (Figure 35).

The foundations of the wooden screen that lay between the warden's office and the main part of the transept were removed by machine, revealing a combination of limestone blocks and concrete (Figure 36). The excavations along the eastern wall of the north transept, within the Warden's office, revealed a large amount of charnel; some of the biggest concentration of human remains recovered during the watching brief.



Figure 36: Western side of north transept after ground reduction



Figure 37: Work in progress on removal of screen foundation, looking north-west

Conclusion

The reduction of the floor level throughout the floor at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray was largely carried out under the assumption that much of the deposits under the ledger stones and flagstones would have been damaged by the lowering of the floor during the 1850s.

It was clear that the lowering of the nave floor had disturbed underlying deposits here, as few human remains and archaeological deposits were revealed during the watching brief on the nave, apart from some small deposits of charnel, which were retrieved for reburial.

However, the floors of the transepts had not been lowered by the 19th century restoration and still contained a large number of undisturbed 18th and 19th century brick chambers containing human remains including the remains of wooden and lead coffins.

In total thirty-six coffin sized brick chambers were encountered; 14 in the south transept, 17 in the north and five within the former Warden's office in the north transept. In addition, two large chambers were encountered, including one in the north transept, which was multi-storeyed with further chambers below the finished floor level. There were also three features in the south transept, which may have been the remains of vaults, although few bones were recovered from them. In addition to these were three undamaged and a damaged lead coffin within the south transept. These were not within brick chambers and were exposed during stripping. There were also further chambers damaged by the central heating system and the remains of chambers within the nave.

The brick chambers were of varying sizes, presumably based on the size of the coffins and broadly of the 'single-break' coffin design. The chambers were often of varying quality and style of brickwork suggesting a number of different builders over a range of dates. Some had been 'squeezed' in alongside earlier chambers in some case causing some damage or modification to the existing chamber (Graves 23/26 & 36/37 and possibly Grave 30).

A few were clearly constructed at the same time and strung together in a group, such as those in the south transept (Graves 8, 9 & 15). These were also sub-rectangular rather than single-break shaped and suggest a family group.

Most of the chambers were situated under ledger stones, some individually but many collectively where several stones lay over a smaller group of chambers suggesting several family members within a single chamber.

The human remains within the chambers almost exclusively consisted of disarticulated bone, with an emphasis on skull remains and long-bones, suggesting charnel deposits. The provenance of these is difficult to determine but they are probably a mixture of remains from the lowering of the nave floor and those earlier burials disturbed by the insertion of the chambers themselves into the nave and transept floors.

Some contained the remains of wooden coffins including rotten wood and 'grips' and other coffin furniture. Although the deposits within the chambers were only excavated to the make-up level of the proposed new floor, there were indications that further, possible articulated remains and coffins, lay below the excavated level.

Some of the chambers were sealed with brickwork (Graves 16, 19 & 28) and in the case of Grave 19 and Grave 28 they contained complete coffins; an undamaged lead coffin in the case of A.Wadd's remains in Grave 28. Grave 19 contained a rotten wooden

coffin complete with wooden 'centre', giving a glimpse into the manner of construction of the brick vaulted chamber.

There were two larger chambers within the church. Grave 7 was sealed by large pieces of slate and contained a single damaged lead coffin and Grave 31 was a storeyed chamber sealed by stone and brickwork containing a shelled coffin of lead within a wooden outer layer, which had a studded fabric covering and a light metal depositum plate.

The foundation of the pillars for the vaulted roof of the transepts were exposed during the final groundworks here. The pillar at the north-western edge of the south transept had been truncated and undermined along the northern edge where the floor level had been lowered in the nave. The ground reduction in the south transept also revealed that the south wall of the transept had been underpinned with blue bricks at some time, confirming the evidence from Test Hole 4 excavated during the previous evaluation.

A large amount of disarticulated bone was recovered during the final stages of the ground reduction along the eastern edge of the north transept in the former Warden's office. Given so much of the floor space under the floor of the church is taken up with brick chambers this space here probably represented one of the few larger spaces within the church where large amounts of bone could be deposited without disturbing further remains.

Discussion

Brick chambers of the kind found throughout the church are generally associated with Victorian burial practices but clearly their use extends into the mid-18th century given the inclusion of the lead coffin dated 1758 within Grave 28.

The brick chambers were mainly 'coffin-shaped', that is of the 'single-break' design which appears to have been the standard coffin shape from around the 16th century, with earlier forms such as anthropomorphic, rectangular or trapezoid shapes gradually dying out (Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow 2012).

There is no doubt that those individuals buried within the church consisted of high status individuals that could afford the fees for an intra-mural burial but also the construction of an individual chamber and coffin.

Poorer members of the parish were often carried to burial within the shared parish coffin to be buried in a simple shroud but the practice of individual coffins for the less wealthy became more commonplace by the 17th century, along with the change in attitude towards privacy in death, a notion that spread from the upper and middle classes into society as a whole. This derived from a perceived loss of propriety from the obvious decay of the remains and gained momentum alongside the move towards more private spaces within churchyards and church buildings (Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow 2012).

Few wooden remains of coffins survived within the chambers and it was not possible to properly examine their construction, apart from part of the rotten outer shell of the multi-shelled coffin in Grave 31. Coffin wood could be elm or the more expensive oak, but was most often deal, a combination of pine, larch or spruce, but wood type would often depend on the local area and availability of timber.

The use of lead for coffins was also a 17th and 18th century development and was a specialised task often undertaken by a plumber. Lead coffins would slow down the

decomposition process, an important consideration for those worried about loss of propriety. It would also help to negate smells seeping into the church from the rotting remains below the surface of the floors, which could have nauseating effects of members of the congregation and was a serious issue during the latter part of the 19th century when churches and churchyards began to suffer serious overcrowding (Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow 2012).

There was a multi-shelled coffin in Grave 31. These coffins were often triple shelled and often contained another wooden coffin within the lead one. The coffin in Grave 31 also had a 'departum' or 'depositum' plate, which were usually iron, but in this case appeared to be made of some lighter material, possibly tin. These were widespread by the 19th century and usually contained the name, date of death and age of the individual alongside Latin mottos or classical imagery. It also appeared to be covered in cloth, most likely baize or velvet, which was fixed to the wooden outer coffin with escutcheons and studs, of the same light metal as the depositum plate. The multi-shelled coffin here and the lead coffin of Mr. A Wadd in Grave 28 are interesting artefacts illustrating the rather complex attitudes to death, propriety and burial practices of this period of the 18th-19th century and it is only appropriate that these coffins are to remain in situ beneath the new floor of this significant parish church.

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The watching brief was carried out by Leon Hunt, Marcella Raiconi, Lucy Brown and Claire Brown.

Archive

The archive for this project will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A132.2014 and consists of the following:

- 1 Unbound copy of this report (2017-026)
- 11 Watching brief recording sheets
- 15 Skeleton recording sheets
- 1 Drawing Record
- 5 Sheets of permatrace containing primary drawings
- 1 Photographic Record
- 1 CD of digital photographs
- 1 Contact sheet of digital photographs

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Appendix 1: OASIS data entry

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work through the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York.

A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in a suitable regional archaeological journal in due course.

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1-292938		
	Project Name	St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SP 75276 19029)		
	Start/end dates of field work	23-01-2017 – 01-03-2017		
	Previous/Future Work	Yes / No		
	Project Type	Watching Brief		
	Site Status	Listed Building		
	Current Land Use	Church		
	Monument Type/Period	Human Remains/ Post medieval Human Remains/Modern Inhumation/Post medieval Cremation Grave/Modern		
	Significant Finds/Period	Urn/Modern Coffin/ Post medieval Coffin Fitting/Post medieval		
	Development Type	New Floor		
	Reason for Investigation	NPPF		
	Position in the Planning Process	Planning condition		
Planning Ref.	DAC Ref: 2014/000167			
PROJECT LOCATION	Site Address/Postcode	St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray		
	Study Area	4800 Sq m		
	Site Coordinates	SP 75276 19029		
	Height OD	74m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	ULAS		
	Project Brief Originator	The Diocesan Advisory Council (DAC)		
	Project Design Originator	ULAS		
	Project Manager	Dr Patrick Clay		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Leon Hunt		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	St. Mary's Church Melton Mowbray Development C.I.O		
PROJECT ARCHIVE		Physical	Digital	Paper
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	ID (Acc. No.)		XA132.2017	XA132.2017
	Contents		Photos	Watching brief records Field Notes Drawings
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	Type	Grey Literature (unpublished)		
	Title	Archaeological attendance during groundworks at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray,		

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