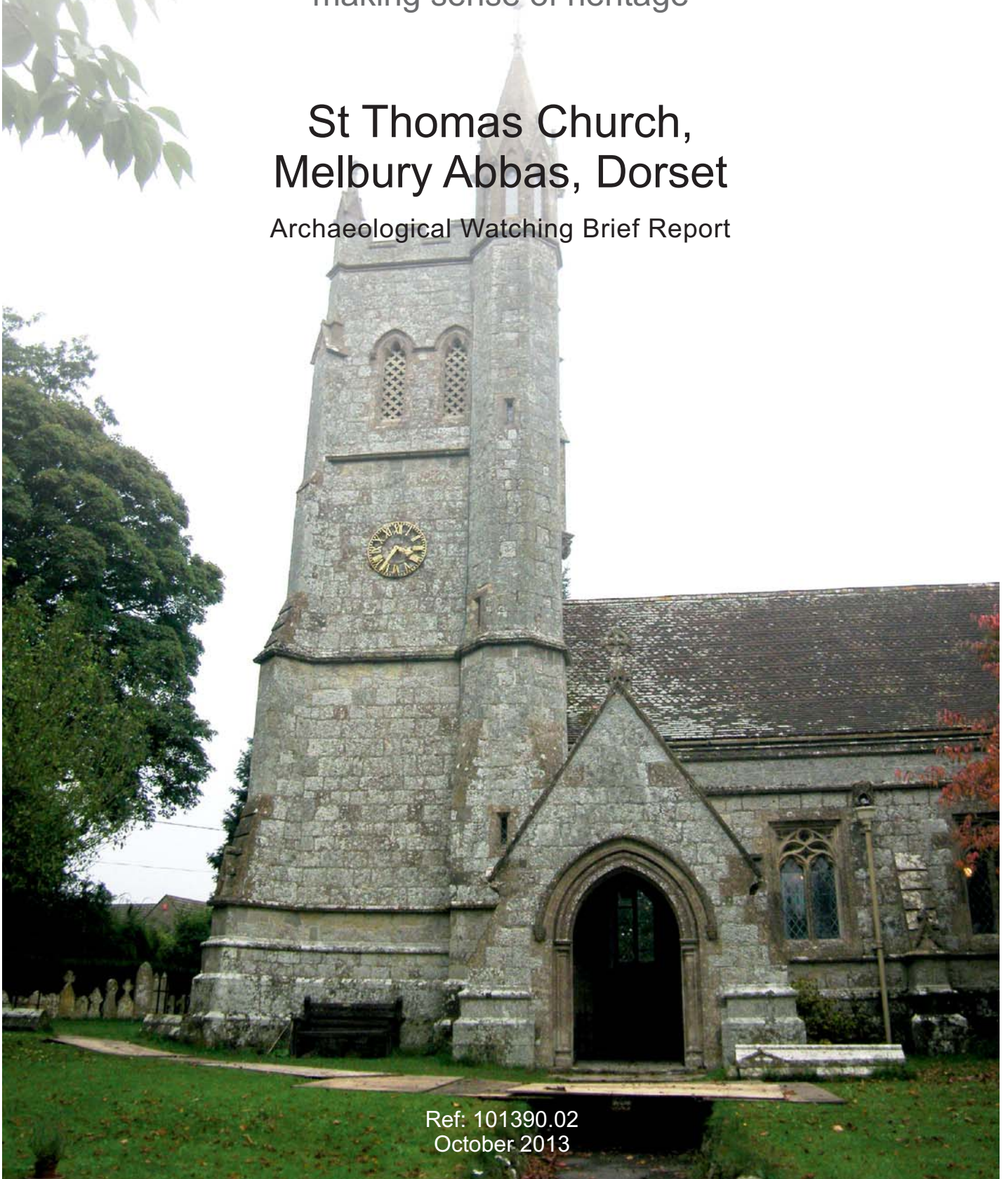




making sense of heritage

# St Thomas Church, Melbury Abbas, Dorset

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Ref: 101390.02  
October 2013



**St Thomas' Church  
Melbury Abbas, Dorset**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

**Prepared for:**

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**November 2013**

**101390.02**



## Quality Assurance

<b>Project Code</b>	101390	<b>Accession Code</b>		<b>Client Ref.</b>	
<b>Planning Application Ref.</b>		<b>Ordnance Survey (OS) national grid reference (NGR)</b>	388214 120069		

Version	Status*	Prepared by	Checked and Approved By	Approver's Signature	Date
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\* I = Internal Draft; E = External Draft; F = Final

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# St Thomas' Church Melbury Abbas, Dorset

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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# St Thomas' Church Melbury Abbas, Dorset

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

### Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Chris Romain Architecture, on behalf of St Thomas' PCC to undertake an archaeological watching brief in the churchyard of St Thomas' Church, Melbury Abbas, Dorset (NGR 388214, 120069). The watching brief consisted of monitoring groundworks associated with the installation of an internal toilet and kitchenette area. These comprised a section of drainage and the excavation of an area up to 3.5m long, 1.7m wide and 2.0m deep to hold a septic tank within the southern part of the churchyard, just to the south of the chancel. The watching brief was undertaken on the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

This watching brief identified the remains of at least fourteen *in situ* burials in addition to a quantity of disarticulated human bone suggesting a larger number of internments. Such a deep sequence and concentration of burials is typical for a churchyard that is documented to have been in use from at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but most likely has a much longer history.



# **St Thomas' Church Melbury Abbas, Dorset**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

### **Acknowledgements**

This project was commissioned by Chris Romain Architecture on behalf of St Thomas' Church PCC and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Chris Romain in this regard.

The watching brief was undertaken by Steve Thompson, Naomi Brennan and Dave Murdie. The report was written and compiled by Naomi Brennan. The illustrations were prepared by Liz James. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Andy Crockett.



# St Thomas' Church Melbury Abbas, Dorset

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Chris Romain Architecture (hereafter 'the Client'), on behalf of St Thomas PCC to undertake an archaeological watching brief during drainage works in the churchyard of St Thomas' Church, Melbury Abbas, Dorset centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 388214 120069 (hereafter 'the Site', **Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 The watching brief consisted of monitoring groundworks associated with the installation of an internal toilet and kitchenette area. These comprised a section of drainage and the excavation of an area up to 3.5m long, 1.7m wide and 2.0m deep to hold a septic tank within the southern part of the churchyard, just to the south of the chancel.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken on the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

#### 1.2 The Site

- 1.2.1 Melbury Abbas is a small scattered village in North Dorset situated some 3.5km to the north-east of Fontmell Magna and just over 3km to the south-east of Shaftsbury. St Thomas' Church is located just to the north of the junction between School Lane and Dinah's Hollow.
- 1.2.2 The church lies on a slightly raised south facing slope at a height of approximately 138m aOD (above Ordnance Datum).
- 1.2.3 The underlying bedrock is listed as the Boyne Hollow Chert Member (sandstone) (British Geological Survey).

### 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 A number of prehistoric round barrows are situated on the downs around the parish and some Romano-British burials were discovered during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the vicinity of Melbury Hill (RCHM 1972, 47-48).
- 2.1.2 The village of Melbury Abbas is recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) as a relatively large settlement of 47 households.
- 2.1.3 The church itself is a Grade II\* Listed Building (list entry 1304933). The current building is 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the church was entirely rebuilt in 1852, though it still includes some 18<sup>th</sup> century monuments from its predecessor (RCHM 1972, 47-48).





### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Aims and objectives

3.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were:

- *To determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains, and should remains be found to be present to ensure their preservation by record.*
- *To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.*
- *To determine or confirm the approximate extent of the remains.*
- *To determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains.*
- *To prepare a report on the results of the watching brief*

#### 3.2 Fieldwork methodology

3.2.1 All archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* record sheets with a unique numbering system for individual contexts. Archaeological features and deposits were hand-drawn at either 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate.

3.2.2 Any disarticulated, isolated human remains and associated coffin furniture discovered during the watching brief were collected, recorded and reburied within the excavation in biodegradable paper bags.

3.2.3 Any *in situ* remains were hand-excavated, their position planned and the remains photographed. They were then collected and bagged as individuals ready for re-interment within the excavation.

3.2.4 A full photographic record was compiled using digital images. The record illustrates both the detail and the general context of the principal features, finds excavated, and the site as a whole. Digital images have been subject to a managed quality control and curation process which has embedded appropriate metadata within the image and ensures the long term accessibility of the image set.

3.2.5 Monitored works were referenced to the OS mapping.

3.2.6 A unique site code **101390** was allocated to the Site, and was used on all records and finds.

#### 3.3 Health and Safety

3.3.1 Health and Safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork. Safe working practices will override archaeological considerations at all times.

3.3.2 All work was carried out in accordance with the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974* and the *Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992*, and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

#### 3.4 Best practice

3.4.1 The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the relevant guidance given in the *Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (IfA 2008) and the *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England* (English Heritage and The Church of England 2005).



## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Details of individual excavated contexts and features are retained in the project archive. Summaries of the excavated sequences can be found in **Appendix 1**. The general stratigraphic sequence consisted of 1.10m of the upper graveyard soil (**101**). As is typical for these deposit it contained frequent fragments of disarticulated bones. Beneath this the character of the soil changed slightly, becoming greyer with a higher silt content (**102**), which continued down to a depth of 1.90m, at which point the natural geology was encountered (**Plate 1**).
- 4.1.2 The monitored works consisted of a service trench that extended south-east from the southern side of the church and terminated in a 3.50m by 1.70m trench for the septic tank (**Figure 2**). This area was excavated to 2.20m below ground level (BGL).

### 4.2 Results

- 4.2.1 No extant grave markers survived within the excavated area, though nearby gravestones suggests that this area of the churchyard was in use up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. A stone base, most probably originally for a cross, was found in the north-west part of the excavation area (**Figure 2; Plate 2**).
- 4.2.2 Fourteen *in situ* burials were identified within the excavation area for the septic tank (**Figure 2; Plates 2-4**). These were situated between 0.90m and 1.80m BGL. However, due to the intercutting of these features, many of these burials had been truncated and disturbed (**Plate 3**). The more recent burials, although clearly visible as grave cuts at a high level, were among the deepest burials encountered. No remains were encountered within the excavated portion of cut **15**, which could be seen to truncate a number of other burials.
- 4.2.3 In addition six distinct groups of disarticulated human bone were also recorded (**Figure 2**). These are likely to be the remains of burials encountered and relocated by later grave diggers. Other disarticulated remains suggest that the minimum number of individuals encountered during the watching brief was probably nearer thirty.
- 4.2.4 Although the graves were broadly west – east aligned, as is customary for Christian burial rites, there was some slight variation in orientation. The majority of the burials were more north-west – south-east aligned. Of those burials that were west – east aligned, these included some of the more recent internments encountered. This dissimilarity in alignment may well indicate different phases of internment and could indicate that the earlier church was on a more north-west – south-east alignment.
- 4.2.5 Although precise age and sex determinations could not be undertaken as part of this work, observations suggest that both male and female individuals and adults and juveniles were represented. Evidence of tooth wear and loss was noted on a number of burials suggesting more mature individuals. In general the dental health appeared to be good although one individual was seen to suffer from dental caries.
- 4.2.6 Evidence suggests that the majority if not all of the burials identified were coffined burials with a number of handles and decorative plates found in addition to the fastening nails (**Plate 4**). A couple of small brass pins were also found which may have fastened clothing or shrouds and a hair pin was identified.



## 5 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

- 5.1.1 A large fragment of worked stone interpreted as a partial quern was recovered unstratified from the lower graveyard soil. All artefacts noted above (i.e. coffin furniture, pins etc.) were re-buried with the relevant associated human remains.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1.1 This watching brief identified the remains of at least fourteen *in situ* burials in addition to a quantity of disarticulated human bone suggesting a larger number of internments. Such a deep sequence and concentration of burials is typical for a churchyard that is documented to have been in use from at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but most likely has a much longer history.

## 7 STORAGE AND CURATION

- 7.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the excavation either be deposited with the Dorset County Museum or retained by the church, the archive is currently under the project code **101390**. Deposition of the finds with the Museum will only be carried out with the full agreement of the landowner.
- 7.1.2 An OASIS online record <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/> will be initiated and key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators Forms. All appropriate parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to the DHER. This will include an uploaded .pdf version of the entire report (a paper copy will also be included with the archive).

### 7.2 Archive

- 7.2.1 The complete site archive, which will include paper records, photographic records, graphics and artefacts, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by Dorset County Museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (Walker 1990; SMA 1995; Richards and Robinson 2000; Brown 2011).

### 7.3 Copyright

- 7.3.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved. The recipient museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profitmaking, and conforms with the *Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003*.
- 7.3.2 This report may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g. Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which we are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferrable by Wessex Archaeology. You are reminded that you remain bound by the conditions of the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of the report



## 7.4 Security Copy

- 7.4.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of a pdf/a file, which will form part of the project archive.

## 8 REFERENCES

### 8.1 Bibliography

British Geological Survey data available at:

<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/services/digmap50wms.html>

Brown, D.H., 2011, *Archaeological archives; a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation (revised edition)*, Archaeological Archives Forum

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## 9 APPENDICES

### 9.1 Appendix 1: Stratigraphic summaries

Context	Description	Depth (m)
101	<i>Layer</i> Graveyard soil. Mid grey-green silty clay. 2% stone, sub-rounded – sub-angular, <1-6cm. Homogeneous. Moderately compact. Bioturbated. Under grass. Fairly clear interface with 101. Overlies 101.	0.00-1.10 bgl
102	<i>Layer</i> Mid grey silty clay loam. 1% stone, sub-angular, <1-2cm. Homogeneous. Moderately compact. Sharp interface with 103. Overlies 103.	1.10-1.90 bgl
103	<i>Natural</i> Natural geology. Mid yellow green clay with sandstone fragments. Beneath this more pale grey with degraded stone fragments.	1.90+ bgl
1	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine with arms to sides and hands resting in area of pelvis. Only upper part of the body seen as lower part truncated. Associated coffin furniture.</b>	<b>0.90 bgl</b>
2	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine with arms to sides. Right leg and feet truncated by cut for burial 11. Associated coffin furniture. Possible double internment with burial 3.</b>	<b>0.90 bgl</b>
3	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine with arms to sides. Only upper part of body seen as truncated by cut for burial 11. Possible double internment with burial 2.</b>	<b>1.00 bgl</b>
4	<b>Burial</b> <b>Presumed north-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, with head to north-west. Only right arm visible, almost entirely truncated by other graves.</b>	<b>1.00 bgl</b>
5	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine, right arm by side with hand on pelvis, left arm behind. Apparently complete though lower legs and feet lie beyond excavation area. Associated coffin furniture.</b>	<b>1.10 bgl</b>
6	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine, arms and hands by side. Only partially seen within excavation, left side of upper body and top of femurs, skull not identified. Associated coffin furniture.</b>	<b>1.10 bgl</b>
7	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine, arms by side, hands on chest. Lower part of body truncated by cut for burial 11.</b>	<b>1.10 bgl</b>
8	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine, arms by side. Head truncated by cut for burial 13. Lower leg truncated by cut 15. North-east edge slightly truncated by cut for burial 11.</b>	<b>1.10 bgl</b>
9	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine, arms by side. Only right shoulder (upper arm, scapula, clavicle, some ribs) visible. Left side truncated by cut for burial 8. Lower part truncated by cut 15.</b>	<b>1.10 bgl</b>
10	<b>Burial</b> <b>North-west – south-east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to north-west. Supine, arms by side. Only upper body visible within excavation.</b>	<b>1.50 bgl</b>
11	<b>Burial</b> <b>West – east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to west. Supine, arms by side. Only upper body visible within excavation. Associated coffin furniture.</b>	<b>1.75 bgl</b>
12	<b>Burial</b> <b>West – east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to west. Supine, arms by side, hands crossed on lower chest. Skull missing, only upper part of body visible. Lower part truncated</b>	<b>1.50 bgl</b>



		<b>by cut 15.</b>	
13	<i>Burial</i>	<b>West – east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to west. Only feet seen within excavation area.</b>	<b>1.80 bgl</b>
14	<i>Burial</i>	<b>West – east aligned grave cut and inhumation, head to west. Only just seen within north-east edge of excavation area.</b>	<b>1.10 bgl</b>
15	<i>Cut</i>	<b>West – east aligned cut that truncates burial 8, 9 and 12 however no remains identified within cut.</b>	<b>1.10-1.80 bgl</b>
I	<i>Bone group</i>	Disarticulated group of remains, likely re-deposited by later grave diggers.	0.80 bgl
II	<i>Bone group</i>	Disarticulated group of remains, likely re-deposited by later grave diggers.	0.90 bgl
III	<i>Bone group</i>	Disarticulated group of remains, likely re-deposited by later grave diggers.	1.00 bgl
IV	<i>Bone group</i>	Disarticulated group of remains, likely re-deposited by later grave diggers.	1.00 bgl
V	<i>Bone group</i>	Disarticulated group of remains, likely re-deposited by later grave diggers.	1.00 bgl
VI	<i>Bone group</i>	Disarticulated group of remains, likely re-deposited by later grave diggers.	1.00 bgl



## 9.2 Appendix 2: OASIS form

OASIS ID: wessexar1-162024

### Project details

Project name	St Thomas Church, Melbury Abbas
Short description of the project	Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Chris Romain Architecture, on behalf of St Thomas PCC to undertake an archaeological watching brief in the churchyard of St Thomas Church, Melbury Abbas, Dorset (NGR 388214, 120069). The watching brief consisted of monitoring groundworks associated with the installation of an internal toilet and kitchenette area. These comprised of a section of drainage and the excavation of an area up to 3.5m long, 1.7m wide and 2.0m deep to hold a septic tank within the southern part of the churchyard, just to the south of the chancel. The watching was undertaken on the 24th to the 26th September 2013. This watching brief identified the remains of at least fourteen in situ burials in addition to a quantity of disarticulated human bone suggesting a larger number of internments. Such a deep sequence and concentration of burials is typical for a churchyard that is documented to have been in use from at least the 18th century, but most likely has a much longer history.
Project dates	Start: 24-10-2013 End: 26-10-2013
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	101390 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	GRAVE Post Medieval
Significant Finds	QUERN Uncertain

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	DORSET NORTH DORSET MELBURY ABBAS St Thomas Church, Melbury Abbas



Postcode SP7 0DZ

Study area 0 Square metres

Site coordinates ST 388214 120069 50 -2 50 54 13 N 002 52 12 W Point

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Wessex Archaeology

Project brief originator Diocesan Archaeologist

Project design originator not undertaken

Project director/manager A Crockett

Project supervisor S Thompson

Project supervisor Naomi Brennan

### Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Dorset County Museums

Physical Archive ID 101390

Physical Contents "Worked stone/lithics"

Digital Archive recipient Dorset County Museums

Digital Archive ID 101390

Digital Contents "other"

Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography"

Paper Archive recipient Dorset County Museums





Paper Contents "other"

Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Plan", "Report"

### Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title St Thomas Church, Melbury Abbas, Dorset: Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Author(s)/Editor(s) Brennan, N.

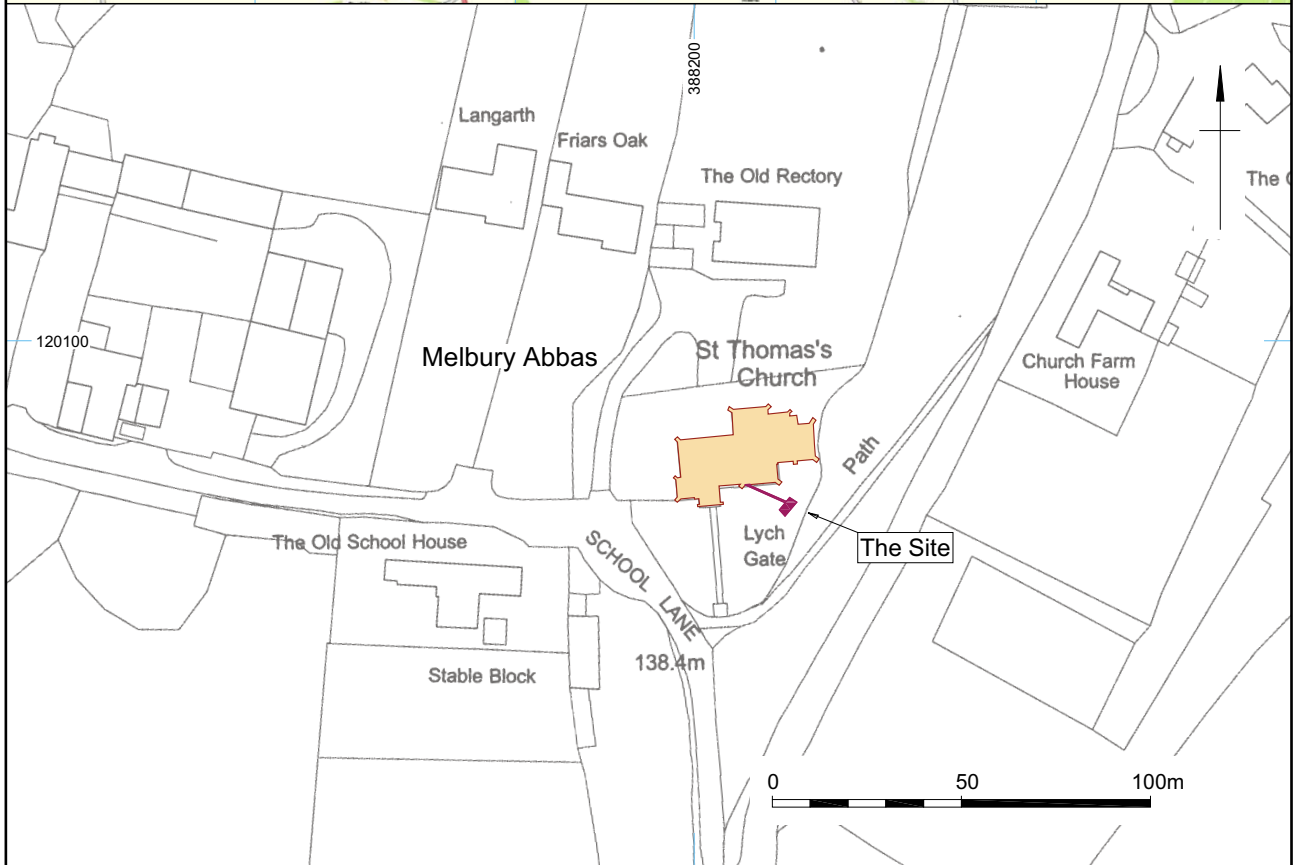
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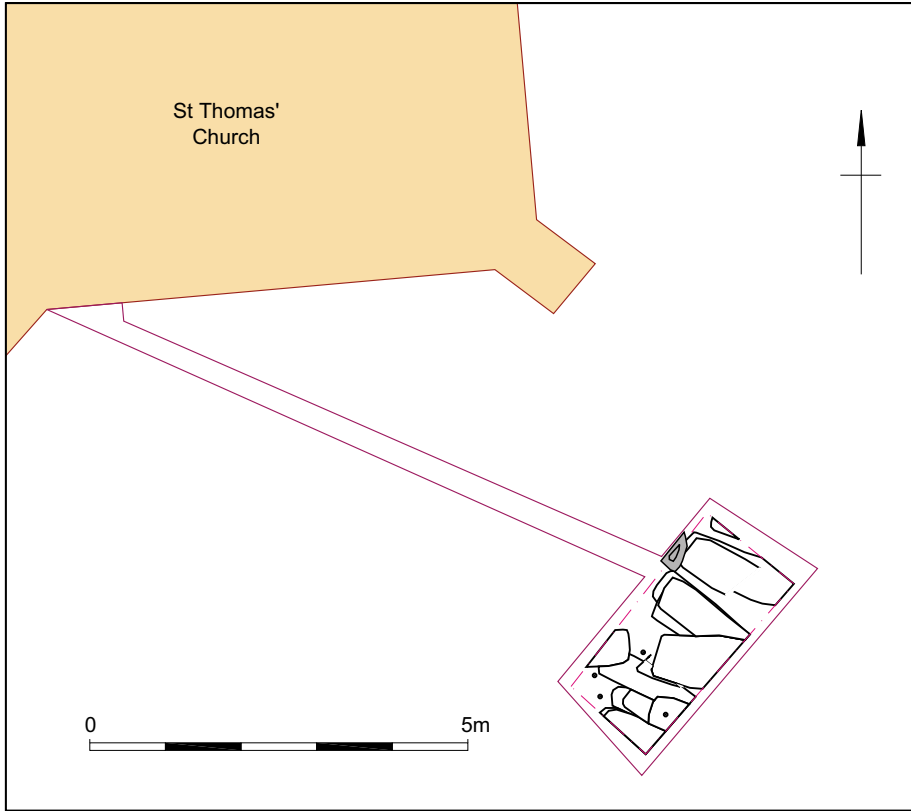
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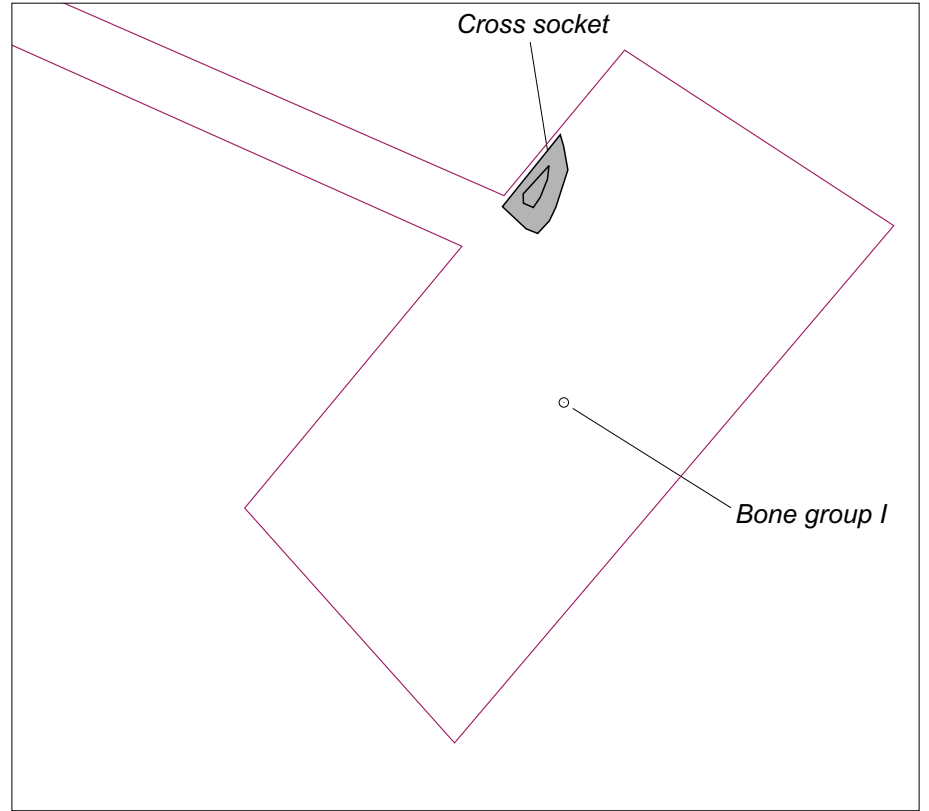
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Site location

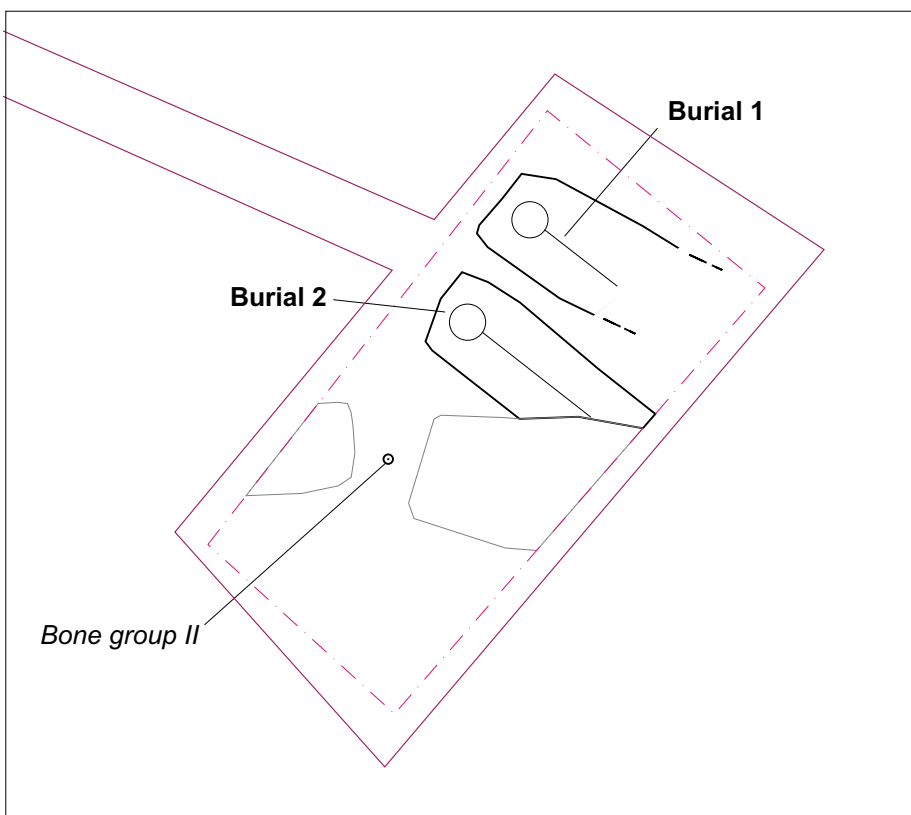
Figure 1



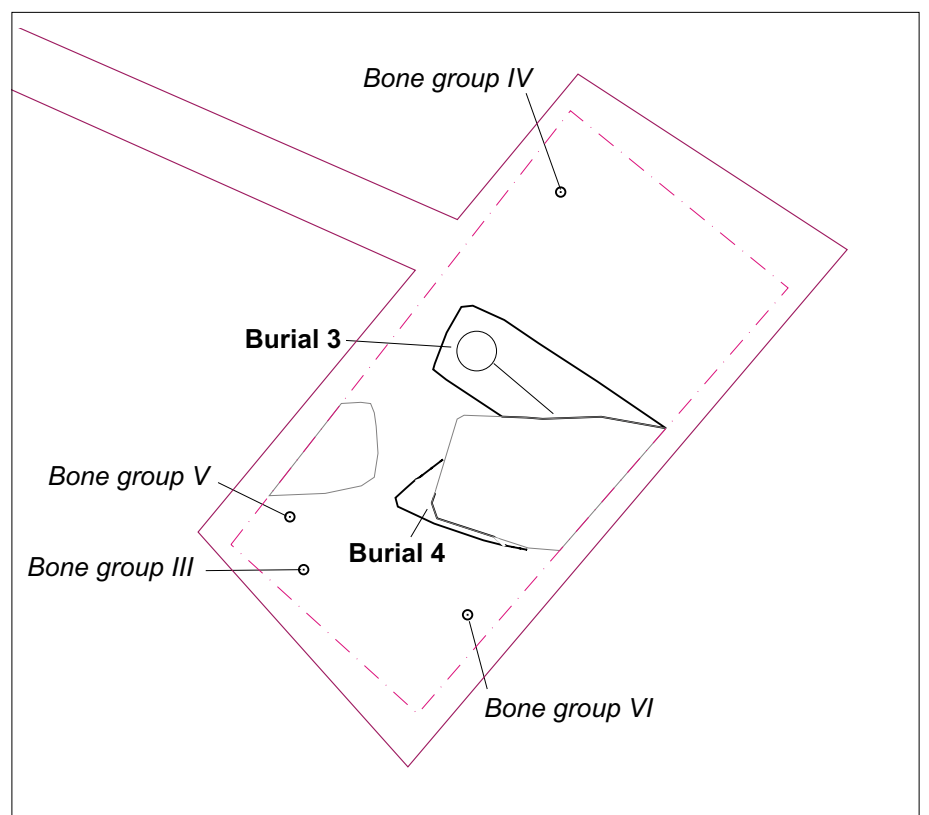
Overall plan of monitored works



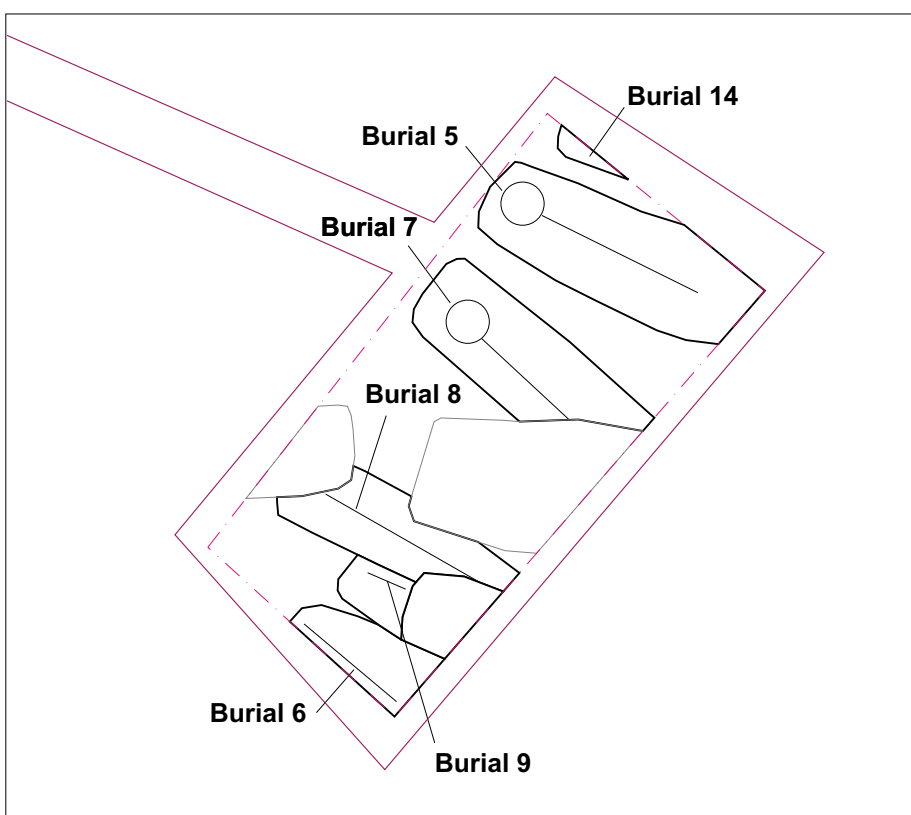
Plan at 0.80m below ground level



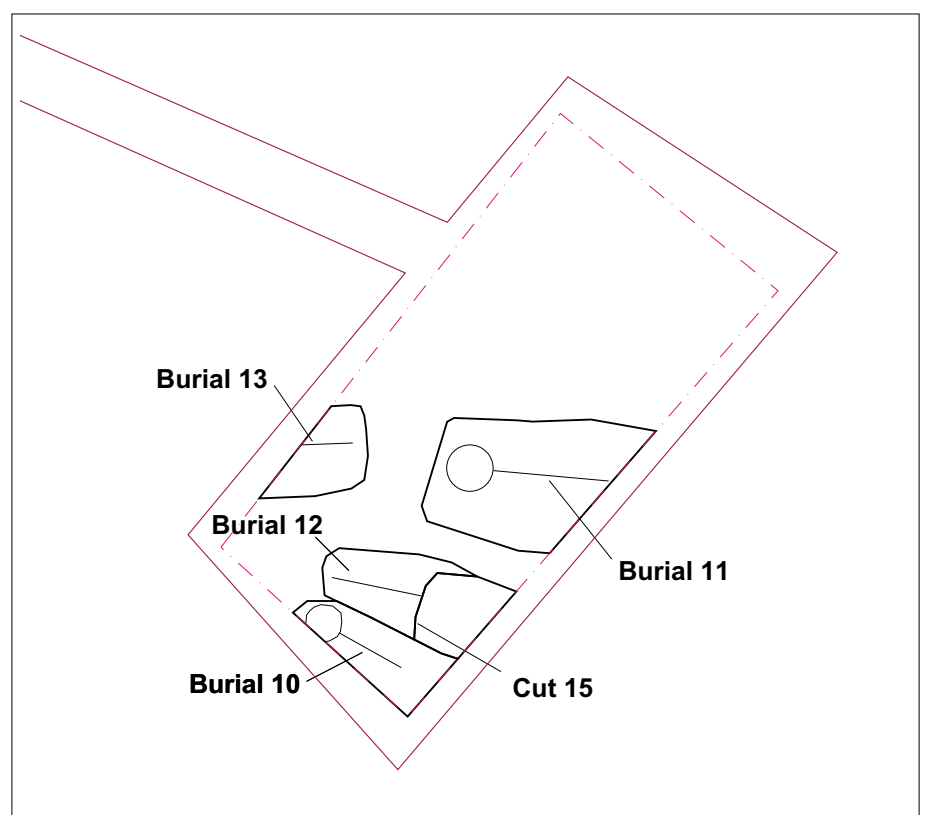
Plan at 0.90m below ground level



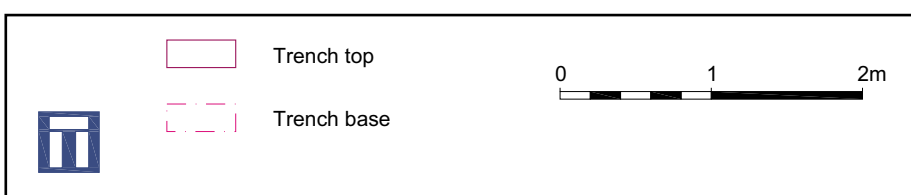
Plan at 1.00m below ground level



Plan at 1.10m below ground level



Plan at 1.50m below ground level



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Sequence of plans showing burials encountered at increasing depths

Figure 2



Plate 1: North-west facing section of excavation area



Plate 2: Burial 5 and stone socket base, view from the north-east



Plate 3: Intercutting burials 8 and 9, view from the north-east



Plate 4: Burial 11, view from the north



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