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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**St Peter's Church, Alvescot,
Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Site Code: SPC13/13

(SP 2738 0460)

St Peter's Church, Alvescot, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For the Incumbent and Parish Wardens of the Church of St Peter

by Andrew Mundin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SPC 13/13b

October 2013

Summary

Site name: St Peter's Church, Alvescot, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 2738 0460

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 15th - 26th July 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Mundin

Site code: SPC 13/13

Summary of results: Pipe trenching for the ground source heating borehole outside the graveyard, following the western church path, past the tower, were observed during excavation. Partial remains of four graves were identified within its course, as were three separate ditches, along with a face of the tower's buttress foundation. The graves were not well dated and limited analysis of the remains was available. Pottery from the ditches indicates that they are at least of Medieval date and broadly contemporary with the earliest standing elements of the Church. A blocked window was uncovered in the filled-in recess on the northern portico exterior wall.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

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St Peter's Church, Alvescot, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Report 13/13b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Peter's Church, Alvescot, Oxfordshire (SP 2738 0460)(Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Brook of Acanthus Clews Architects, Acanthus House, 57 Highworth Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE, on behalf of the Church.

Planning consent (11/0207/P/FP) has been granted by West Oxfordshire District Council to construct a new single-storey extension of the NW side of the Church. This would contain along with a new toilet, a ground source heat pump which would improve the heating within the church. Due to the potential of further archaeological deposits being present along the length of the pipe trenching for the heating duct, two conditions have been attached to the consent relating to archaeology. Conditions 8 and 9 require an archaeological watching brief to be implemented during the groundworks, based on a written scheme of investigation (WSI), approved by the local planning authority. Archaeological deposits were identified during the excavation of the slab for the new extension, and it is thought that more information could be gained about the undated wall that was found on the western side of the excavation, underlying the northern nave and tower buttress, along with any further datable material that identified Roman, Saxon and Medieval pottery (Muddin 2013).

This is in accordance with the Department of the Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement 5, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5, 2010), which has since been superseded by the *National Planning Policy Framework*. The WSI was based on a brief (Coddington 2011) supplied by, and was approved by, Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, as adviser to the District Council on matters pertaining to archaeology in planning, with the fieldwork also monitored by him. The fieldwork was carried out by Andrew Muddin and Tim Dawson from the 15th to 26th July 2013. The site code is SPC 13/13, of which is the second report associated with these works. The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the north side of the elongated village of Alvescot (Fig. 1), with the church accessible off Mill Lane (Fig.2). This small village in West Oxfordshire, situated on the B4020, lies south-west of Brize Norton

and Carterton, *c.*2km from the town centre. The underlying geology is Kellaways Sand (BGS 1982) and the top of the graveyard by the dig location was recorded at a height of 88m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in the brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Coddington 2011). The church is a Grade II* Listed Building (LB 253323). The earliest surviving elements of a chapel are the northern portico, and the nave doorway, both of the 13th century. The northern aspects of the existing church contain a blocked recess on the western facing wall of the northern portico and a blocked doorway with visible exterior tracery located on the nave wall. The tower contains a 15th-century construction, which was probably later strengthened with buttresses. It was thought that this site could contain a earlier church, probably Saxon, and an even earlier pre-church structure than the initial chapel, due to the presence of Roman brick in the general fabric of the church. Roman settlement is thought to exist in a field east of the church at Gillens Close, due to quantities of pottery recovered from this field over time (VCH 2006).

Like other parishes of Bampton, this parish is long and thin, with the church towards the centre. It is noted that several dispersed small settlements were mostly abandoned in the Late Medieval period. The existing village grew in the 18th century along the Lechlade-Bampton road (VCH 2006).

To the north of the church, a range of earthworks are visible. Most represent ridge and furrow from late Medieval agriculture and then later gravel working, but earlier elements are visible, especially towards Black Bourton. One area, referred to on historic maps, is the 'Old Court Grounds', covering most of the portion of the earthworks south from the mill leat on the Shill Brook.

Recent work at the church, has reflected this early use of the site of the church, with Roman, Saxon and Medieval pottery recovered during archaeological observations during the construction of the floor slab for a new toilet and boiler house extension. Along with this evidence, four 18th/19th-century brick-lined crypts were discovered, three of which were recorded (Mundin 2013). One of those, of Catherine Neate, who's grave slab was lifted at the start of the works, will be repositioned into the fabric of the new extension.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. If human remains were discovered along the length of the pipe trench, they were to be recorded

and lifted, if they were under immediate threat of destruction. These would then be reburied at the Church digression. Other finds were to be retained for further study.

The reduced dig was carried out largely with a Kubota-type mechanical excavator, along the western church path. The existing foundation of the church were also hand cleaned and photographically recorded. All machine works were undertaken with a bladed bucket.

Results

Main pipe trench

The pipe trenching of the new heating ducts would extend westwards from the new extension floor slab and follow the course of the western church path out of the graveyard using the main gate (Fig. 2). A graded slope was created from the height of the top of the new slab, to the eventual final depth of the trench at 1m deep. The top of a ditch (6) was encountered c. 3m west from the start of excavation at the reduced level. The top of this feature was noted at a depth of 0.86m (Fig. 3; Pl. 1). It consisted a single fill, though the upper part of the fill and its interface with the overburden (50) was covered with a layer of grey limestone (66), elements of which had shown been heat affected. Six sherds of locally produced Early Medieval pottery were recovered from this primary fill of this ditch (55). One piece of heat affected clay, possible daub was also recovered from this fill.

At the corner of the north-western tower buttress, the pipe trench turned south-westwards towards the church path. In the trench's northern face, the northern end coursing of foundation for the tower buttress was encountered. This piece of masonry measured 1.67m long, though it incorporated a stone drain trough which would have run around the base of the tower and buttress. This is no longer visible on the surface. It contained a ceramic drain pipe to help move water away from the base of the tower (Pl. 3). The base of this foundation was 0.76m below ground level. Three courses were visible, loose coursing with the drain making the first, then larger blocks making the second. The third was flat, long blocks roughly 460mm long and 100mm thick.

Once past the corner of the tower, the trench ran southwards, down the church path. Two features were encountered at a depth of 0.7m below ground level. A ditch (11) was seen to be cut by the eastern end of grave (7) which was aligned E-W (Fig. 3, Pl. 2). Only tarsals and phalanges of the feet of a skeleton were uncovered and were generally seen to be in poor condition (sk57). The fill of this grave (58) was a brown silty clay, 0.15m deep. The fill contained twelve sherds of medieval pottery, thought to be from the same vessel. A ferrous nail was also recovered. It is possible that the finds originally came from the earlier ditch disturbed by the grave. The underlying ditch was aligned west-north-west by east-south-east and was 0.65m wide. It reached a depth of

0.31m deep at a depth of 0.7m. It contained a single fill of brown silty clay (65) which reached a depth of 0.31m deep.

Along the remainder of the trench, which was viewed only to the point where it exited of the graveyard, three further graves were encountered. At 5m from the corner of the tower buttress, the width of the pipe trench narrowed to 0.6 due to the need to avoid alive electricity cable.. At 10m south-westwards along the trench, two graves, side by side were encountered, both at a depth of 0.8m. Grave 8, which was 0.8m wide, aligned E-W, uncovered the central part of the skeleton, which had the chest cavity, pelvis and the upper leg bones present (sk59). The left arm was not present. The fill of this grave was a brown silty clay with occasional limestone inclusions (60). The depth of the grave was 0.28m deep. No finds other than human bone were recovered from this fill. Ferrous staining was the only indicator of nails being used for a possible coffin. No sex or age could be ascertained on site for this burial.

The western end of grave 9 was 0.7m wide, and uncovered the full skull with the top of the shoulders and upper chest cavity (sk61). This grave was 0.27m deep, filled with a brown silty clay with occasional limestone inclusions (62). One sherd of redeposited Roman pottery was recovered from this fill. From identifiable elements uncovered of this skeleton, it is thought that this is a adult, female skeleton. The teeth are worn but not excessively so.

At 14m south-west along the trench, a possible S-N aligned grave was encountered. The only elements of human bone that were encountered from this grave were the lower legs at the northern end of this grave (Sk63). The grave was at least 0.52m wide. It was filled with a brown silty clay, and no finds were uncovered (64).

Service run addition

Once the length of the pipe trench had been dug, an additional drainage service run was linked to it. This ran parallel to it, running past the northern side of the new slab to link to the newly created drainage (Fig. 3). A continuation of the Ditch 6 was located (ditch 12), showing that this ditch ran on a south-west to north-east axis. This ditch probably underlay the tower buttress. Medieval pottery and animal bone were recovered from Ditch 12.

Ditch 13 was a previously unidentified feature running N-S from the area where the wall had been found in the previous archaeological works (wall 54 in cut 5). This ditch was 1.3m wide, but no depth was investigated. The top of the feature was at 0.72m deep. It contained brown clayey silt with moderate to frequent limestone pieces (68). Five pieces of animal bone were recovered from Ditch 13, but no pottery was uncovered.

Investigation of west facing portico wall

The opening for the access into the church for the new extension was also started during these works. As the worked stone was visible of the outer face of the transept wall, hand excavation of the infill of the recess was carried out under archaeological supervision. At a depth of 0.7m, tracery was uncovered of a window, which had a lime-faced recess.

Externally the window was set low to the existing ground level with a rounded arch of sandstone with chamfers. On the north side of the window was a chamfered block of limestone supporting the arch; none was present on the south side. It is unclear whether this is original or a later repair. The south side of the arch is supported on the same layered rubble construction as the rest of the wall face. The rounded arch is typical of the Norman style of the 12th century (Heath 1912) and unlike any other arch within the church. Internally the window opening is tall and narrow with a chamfered sill and a pointed head with trefoil head. The size of the opening is more typical of earlier styles, whilst the pointed head is typical of the 13th century gothic style. The trefoil tracery can be dated from the later 13th century (Friar 1996). Similar windows can be seen elsewhere in the church.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 27 sherds with a total weight of 268g. It was recorded, where appropriate, utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 23 sherds, 250g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 2 sherds, 10g,

In addition, two small sherds of Roman material (8g) were noted. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. The Roman material aside, all the sherds are in good condition and appear reliably stratified. Most of the sherds from context 58 are from a single vessel, a jar.

Animal bone

Three contexts contained animal bone. Ditch 11 contained one piece of longbone shaft from a small to mid size animal, probably a sheep/goat. Ditch 12 contained three pieces of bone, one was an equine tooth, and two poorly preserved pieces; one a broken shaft from long bone of a small to mid-sized animal and a small piece of a rib

bone. Five pieces of animal bone were recovered from Ditch 13. Most of a complete scapula was recovered from a large animal (horse or cattle). Another was the distal end of a similar piece. The two remaining pieces were two split pieces of a poorly preserved shaft fragment of a large animal.

Metal finds

Three pieces were recovered from two contexts. Two pieces of copper alloy came from the site overburden (50). One was a silver-plated, rough button 26mm in diameter, and the other was a piece of very decayed wood, with four copper alloy, or brass upholstery nails still attached. All the nails had a head radius of 8mm. One ferrous nail, possibly a coffin nail, 34mm long was recovered from Grave 7.

Other finds

One piece of fired clay was recovered from Grave 6, weighing 16g and three pieces of stone were taken as a sample from the layer at the top of Ditch 6 (66). These three pieces of grey limestone weighed a total of 604g. One was heat affected, from a relatively even, high temperature source.

Conclusion

The excavation has produced remains relating to the early origins of the church. Though difficult to interpret, due to the confined nature of the trenches, early features of Medieval, possibly even late Saxon, date have been found. The ditch features may be a continuation of the extensive landscape of Medieval earthworks situated north of the church. A chapel was originally built at Alvescot in the early 12th century, but at first remained subject to the mother church at Bampton, meaning that it was not licensed to perform burials (among other services) until after the Reformation. The graves themselves, seem to indicate burial at the site during a time either before or after the Bampton parish retained its burial rights, ie before the 12th or after the 15th century: the north-south aligned grave is unusual and may potentially indicate a pre-Christian date.

The discovery of the blocked window is an interesting find. Its style is Early Medieval/Norman, like other internal early features of the church which were uncovered during Victorian restoration (VCH 2006).

References

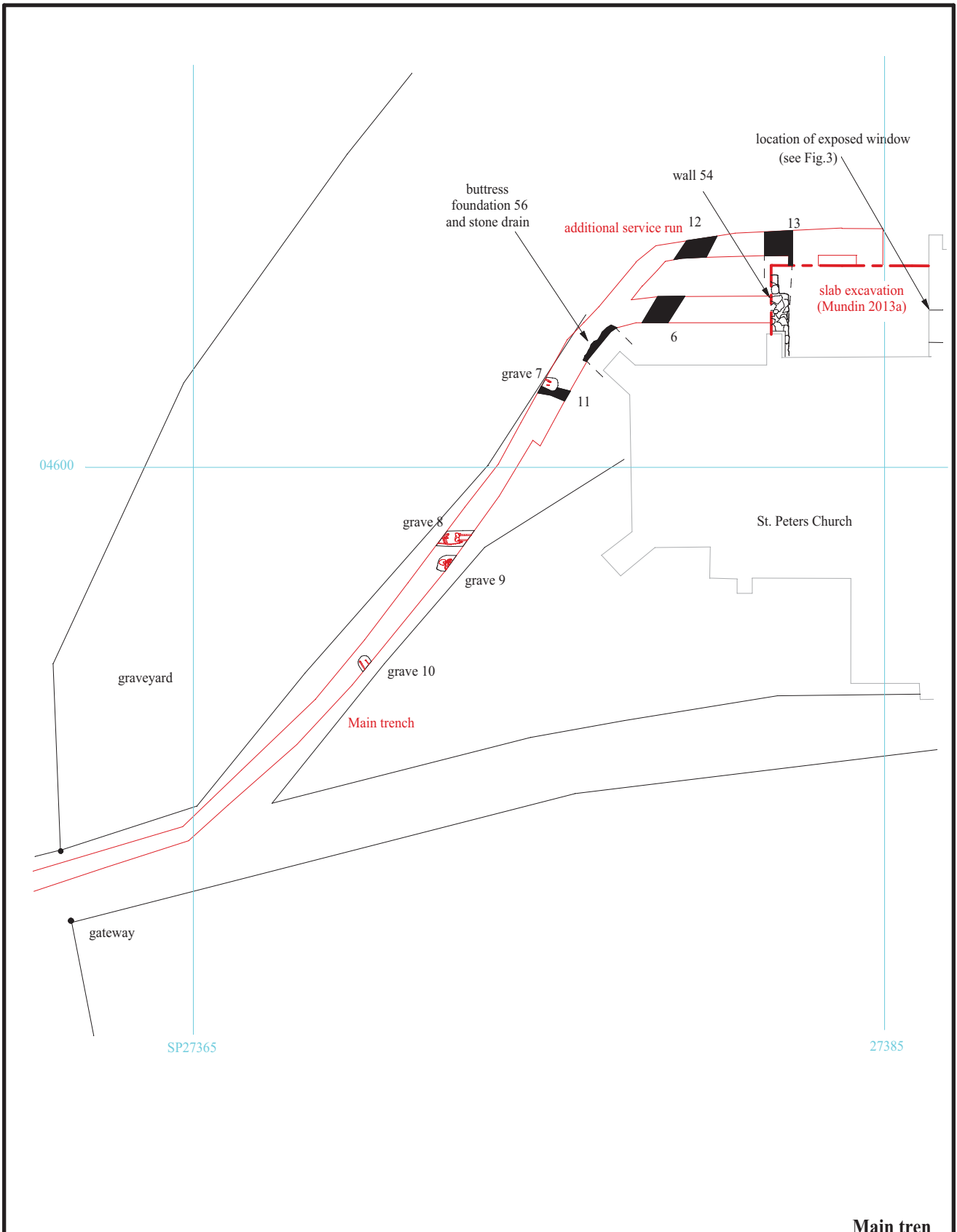
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APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of features excavated

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
6	55	Ditch	Saxon-Early Medieval	Pottery
	66			
	56	Buttress foundation		
7	57	Grave	Post-13th century	Pottery
	58			
8	59	Grave		
	60			
9	61	Grave		
	62			
10	63	Grave		
	64			
11	65	Ditch	Pre-13th century	Pottery
12	67	Ditch	Saxon-Early Medieval	Pottery
13	68	Ditch		

APPENDIX 2: Pottery catalogue by number of sherds and weight (in g).

Cut	Deposit	<i>Roman</i>		<i>OXAC</i>		<i>OXY</i>	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
	50	1	5	2	4		
6	55			6	45		
7	58			12	182		
9	62	1	3				
11	65			2	13		
12	67			1	6	2	10
	Total	2	8	23	250	2	10



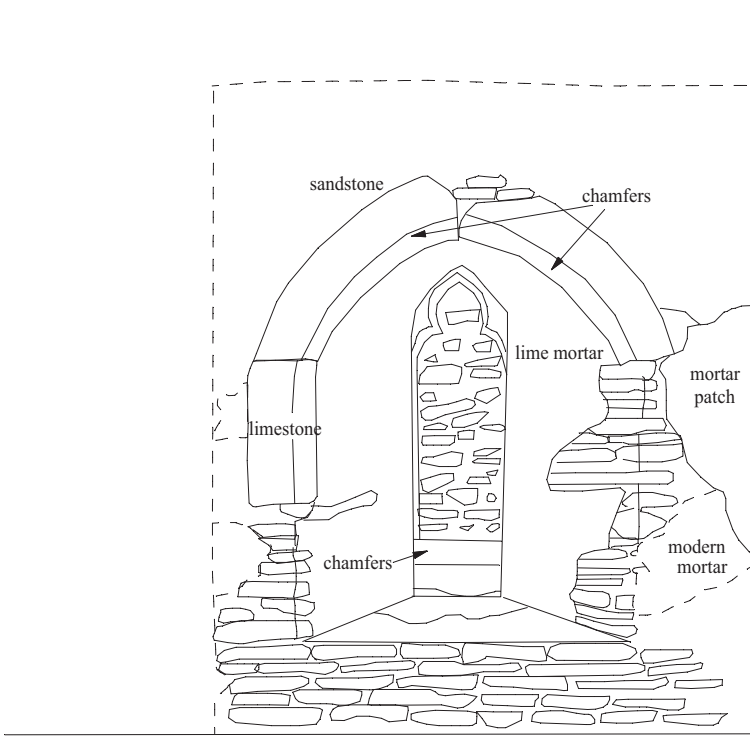
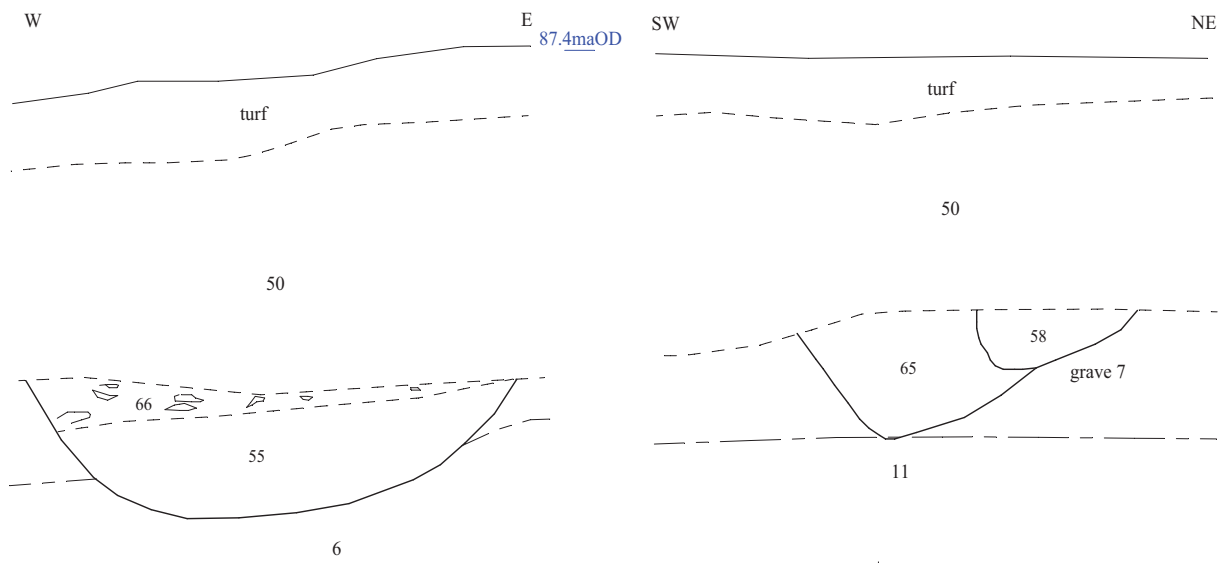
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Figure 2. Detail of observed area.



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Figure 3. Sections.





Plate 1. Ditch 6, looking north, Scales: 0.5m.



Plate 2. Ditch 11 cut by grave 7, looking south west, Scales: 0.5m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Tower buttress foundation (56) looking south east, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Exposed window, north transept wall, west face, Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.

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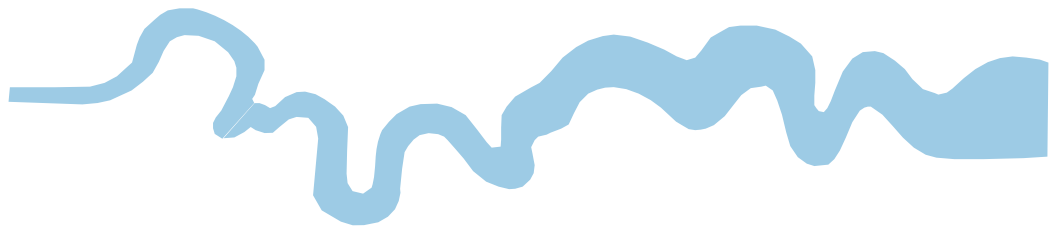
Plates 3 - 4.

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late -----	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle -----	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early -----	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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