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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**St. Leonard's Church,  
Watlington, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Andy Mordin**

**Site Code: WCW14/65**

**(SU 6847 9474)**

# **St Leonard's Church, Hill Road, Watlington, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
For the Incumbent and Churchwardens  
of St Leonard's Church**

by Andrew Mundin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WCW 14/65

**July 2014**

## Summary

**Site name:** St. Leonard's Church, Watlington, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 6847 9474

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 22nd May - 4th June 2014

**Site supervisor:** Andrew Mordin and Genni Elliott

**Site code:** WCW 14-65

**Area of site:** 120 sq m

**Summary of results:** Trenches were dug for utilities leading to the exterior of the northern aisle of the church. Part of the existing church path was lifted, which had been created with 19th century upturned grave slabs. A new soakaway was also dug. In total, parts of fourteen graves were uncovered, all probably dating from the 18th and 19th century.

Two sherds of Medieval pottery was uncovered one from the spoilheaps and one from a grave cut along with a clay pipe stem.

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

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# **St Leonard's Church, Hill Road, Watlington, Oxfordshire**

## **An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Andrew Mundin

**Report 14/65**

### **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Leonard's Church, Hill Road, Watlington, Oxfordshire, OX9 5AJ (SU 6847 9474) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Brook, of Acanthus Clews Architects, Acanthus House, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, OX16 9BE, on behalf of the Incumbent and Churchwardens of St Leonard's Church.

Planning permission (P11/E2510) has been gained from South Oxfordshire District Council and a faculty from the Archdeaconry of Oxfordshire, to build an extension on the northern aisle of St Leonard's Church. Due to the location of the works within the graveyard and the probable presence of skeletal remains, along with possible archaeological deposits, a condition had been attached to the consent and faculty which requires an archaeological watching brief to be arranged and to be maintained during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, advisers to the District Council on archaeological planning matters within the planning process. The specification was based on a brief (Oram 2012) prepared by him and the fieldwork was also monitored by him. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Mundin and Genni Elliott between 22nd May and 4th June 2014. The site code is WCW 14/65.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

### **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on the north side of the small town of Watlington within South Oxfordshire. The church is bounded by 20th-century housing to the north which lies off Pyrton Lane, and the site of the village hall to the south. The village hall is currently disused. The churchyard and graveyard are still in active use with new graves created to the north-east of the church, with no grave markers; old or current, to the north of the church. The underlying geology is the edge of alluvial clay and young Coombe gravel and silt deposits overlying Lower

Chalk (BGS 1980). The site is approximately 100m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). Chalk marl was generally seen at the base of excavation, and identified as the natural geology.

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential at the site has been highlighted in the brief (Oram 2012). In summary, the church is a Grade II\* Listed building, which has 12th-century origins, but was greatly redesigned by H J Tollit and E Dolby from 1873 (Airs *et al.* 1975). The northern aisle dates from this time. The original shape of the church is recorded at the time of Enclosure for Watlington from a map of 1815 (Fig. 4). The south wall is probably the oldest surviving element of the present church, with a 14th-century window in the north-east aisle. The tower is flint-rubble fill of limestone ashlar quoins, and dates from the 15th century. A watching brief carried out on the floor of the church recorded an earlier floor surface and undated inhumations (Bashford 2001). Monuments within the church interior date burials from as early as the 16th century.

The site is also located 100m from the site of a Manor House that was located on the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1876 as a 'castle' along with the remains of a 'chapel' (Fig. 5) . This manor was first documented in 1250 (Airs *et al.* 1975), and could be why the church was built at this location. The manor was given a licence to crenellate in 1338, (hence marked as 'castle' by the Ordnance Survey). A moat is also recorded on the map of 1876, south-east of the graveyard, but it is unknown whether this was an addition or is original. The manor was demolished in the early 17th century (Airs *et al.* 1973).

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record archaeological deposits threatened by destruction by development. This would involve the recording of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in this instance the observation of service trenches. The footings for the new extension were to be carried out once the church had gained more funding. Most of the trenching was carried out by a small mechanical excavator, though access was sometimes limited and works were carried out by hand, especially in proximity close to the church wall, due to the edge of the graveyard being banked. All machine excavation was carried out with a bladed ditching bucket, and most trenching was particularly narrow, 0.35m, making access to the trenches very restricted. All spoilheaps were checked for finds and all disarticulated human bone where uncovered was separately bagged from articulated bone. These were retained by the Church for reburial.

## Results (Fig. 3)

Initially a small length of hand-dug trench was opened up against the north-west corner of the exterior wall of the north aisle. This linked the plant room with the work. This area was very disturbed, down to the base of excavation, and it was noted that the construction of this buried plant room would have removed all the original strata at this location. One fragment of human cranium was recovered from this trench from the northern section, opposite the existing foundation, from a depth of 0.6m within a shallow fill (51), just above natural geology. A possible grave cut (1) was seen in section here, and if undisturbed would run in a east-west direction but it was very unclear. The banking for the graveyard raised the ground level by 0.4m further north of this location. The trench that was later dug by machine around the western edge of the proposed extension, showed this increased depth, as natural was only reached in the base of the trench at 1.1m. No further human bone was recovered from this location.

Once the pipe trench was excavated between the retaining wall for the graveyard and new extension, the mechanical excavator was utilized more to reach a final excavated depth of 1.1m deep. As a requirement of the works, the stone slabs of the existing church path were lifted so as not to be damaged. These were seen to be grave stones, some cut to fit their new location. Grave stone 1 (number as green s1 on Fig. 3), was dedicated to Mr and Mrs William Copus: William died in 1906, and his wife Hannah died 1917 (Pl. 5). A search of the burial record, stored at the Oxfordshire History Centre, in Oxford, recorded that he died at his home in Watlington, aged 86, whereas she died in Littlemore Asylum aged 85. Other grave stones were uncovered and will be discussed below.

Grave cut 4 was uncovered in the southern section of the first man-hole chamber (Fig. 3). This cut was thought to be rectangular though only the northern edge was uncovered. It was recorded as 1.7m long, but was truncated by a pipe trench at its western extent. The top of the cut was seen in section to 0.7m deep and reached the beyond the base of excavation of 1.2m. Its fill was a dark grey clayey silt with occasional chalk marl (59). No bone was recovered from this grave, though only 0.15m width was uncovered. All of the remainder of this burial would be under the southern section.

At the junction of the second man-hole chamber, a modern, stone rubble-filled soakaway was re-excavated. The base of this was no greater than the final excavated depth of 1.25m, but had disturbed subsoil levels at the depth of any possible grave at this location. No bone came from this fill. Once the pipe trench turned to run NW-SE, running down the eastern edge of the proposed extension, two graves (5 and 6) were encountered perpendicular to the trench. Grave 5 was at a maximum depth of 1.4m in section, and was represented by skull

fragments of a child no more than 10 years old (Sk 60). The mandible, part of the cranium and front of the skull, was in three large parts. Its backfill was a dark grey silty clay (61).

Grave 6 contained the pelvic area of an adult female, including the lower ribs, pelvis and tops of the femoral heads (Sk 62). This was seen at a maximum depth of 1.16m, and the grave was 0.5m wide. The backfill of this grave was a dark grey brown silty clay (63). Other than human bone, no other finds, datable or otherwise, were recovered from these graves.

Another length of trench from inside the proposed area of the extension uncovered two graves (10 and 11). These recovered the left side of leg and arm bones of an interment, and 1.4m deep in section. The length of this grave was no greater than 1.1m, though was not representative of the full grave, with the eastern end under the southern section. This was also the case with the other grave here, Grave 11. This was filled with the lower left arm bones, parts of the pelvis, and lower ribs. The grave fill was 72, a soft grey brown silty clay. The maximum depth of this grave was 1.56m. A fallen grave stone (Pl. 8) was uncovered flat beneath the turf during the excavation of this portion of the trenching, and read 'In affectionate remembrance of William Banwell, who departed this life June 4th 1848, aged 48 years. I know that my redeemer lives. Also Elizabeth, wife of William, died at Huntercombe October 11th 1876, aged 77. Also Henry James, eldest son, who died June 1849 aged 26 years.' It is uncertain that this gravestone is associated with either grave 10 nor 11.

During the excavation of the surface water drain, which would link into the drain at a shallower depth of 0.4m, more of the church path slabs were lifted. Three slabs to the east of the existing buttress were lifted (Pl. 6 and Pl.7). These are labelled on Fig. 3 as s2, s3 and s4. Grave slab 2 (Pl. 6), made reference to the children of John and Martha Lovelock, of which this grave slab belonged to Job, a infant that had died in 1817 aged 18 months. It also mentions the memory of Caroline, who died aged 3 in 1817, Jane, died 1833 aged 19 and another Martha who died 1839, at either 13 or 18 years old. Grave slab 3 has been broken to fit the position required within the path, and therefore the name portion has been removed, but this individual's grave stone notes that they died age 17. Grave stone 3 reads 'Sacred to the memory of Mary Matilda, Wife of Mr John Stone, Surgeon, and daughter of John and Martha Lovelock, who died July 23 1816 aged 33. Also Caroline Matilda Lovelock, died April 13th 1817, aged 63. John Lovelock died May 11th 1818 aged 61, Humphery John Stone died February 1 1850. 1 year'. The fourth slab lifted (Pl. 7) is dedicated to William Sowden, who died aged 65 in 1878. The top has been broken off the W of William. A corner piece of this slab was uncovered within the excavated trench. This also read 'To', placed above the 'W'.

The trenching continued from a chamber dug at the location of Grave 5, once the initial bone had been removed. Further elements of this grave were found, which included vertebrae and the right side of the rib cage (sk 60), but excavation was then raised to 1.24m, so no further bone from this grave was uncovered. This trench was aligned NE-SW to avoid the Hornbeam planted here in the north of the graveyard. This trench was 9m long and uncovered partial remains of a further four graves (Graves 7, 8, 11, 12). Grave 7 only uncovered the lower legs within the grave and tarsals of the right leg (Sk 64). A copper alloy pin and button were also uncovered from this grave. The backfill of this grave was similar to the others (65). The central part of Grave 8 was uncovered within the trench however was not deep enough to reach most of the remains, with the backfill containing no finds (66). Grave 9 also uncovered the central part of this grave, though had been previously disturbed by an older drain encroaching from the north. Most of the bone in this grave was disturbed by machine excavation due to the trench depth, but it too could be identified as a young child's grave, from diagnostic elements of the skull (Sk 67). The grave measured 1.05m long, 0.3m wide, with the bone 0.1m lower than the excavation of the previous drainpipe. The drain had disturbed the location of the left arm bones, which were not present. Grave 12 was located on the turn of the trench, before it entered the newly dug soakaway to the east of the Hornbeam. This grave uncovered the pelvis and femoral heads, in fair condition. These bones were contained within a dark grey silty clay backfill (74). Other than these bones being adult, they could not be further identified as the condition of the pelvis was too poor.

The new soakaway was 1.5m square and was dug by machine. At a depth of 0.78m four cuts were investigated with hand tools, visibly cutting through the light grey natural geology. On the eastern section, Grave 2 was in the centre of the eastern section and measured 0.47m wide. At the top of this grave fill (53) was a complete perinatal skeleton. These bones all lay above further remains of a supine adult skeleton which was in a good complete condition. The skull and upper part to the collar bones and humeri were uncovered (Pl.1). The lowest depth of this grave was 0.96m deep.

In the south-eastern corner of the soakaway section was the north-western corner of Grave 3. Only the skull was uncovered here, partly in the section (Pl. 2). Parts of a coffin were in evidence in this grave, from ferrous nails (57), with a thin fragmentary copper alloy plaque overlying the skull at the top. This was all contained within this grave's backfill (58). The top of the skull was noted to be at a depth of 1.1m in section.

On further excavation, by machine, human bones within grave cuts were encountered on the western side. These were at a depth of 1.4m deep. Continuation of the fill of Grave 14 uncovered tarsals, metatarsals and phalanges of a skeleton (sk 75). Lower leg bones and other bones of the legs were uncovered within Grave 13, at



1.3m deep. Final excavation of the soakaway reached into the underlying natural geology, well beyond the final depth of the base of any of these graves, 1.5m deep.

No features other than the graves and previous drains were encountered.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 2 sherds with a total weight of 21g. They are both Brill/Boarstall Ware, fabric OXAM in the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1985; 1994), a very common find in the region, and dateable to c AD1200 – 1600. Both of the sherds most likely to date to earlier part of the production span of the industry.

One sherd, weighing 13g, was unstratified. It is the handle from a small glazed jug. The other sherd, weighing 8g, occurred in context 53 (grave 2). It is also from a glazed vessel, probably also a jug. Both are typical products of the tradition.

### *Human bone by Ceri Falys*

Portions of 11 inhumations from 14 graves were identified from photographic records taken in the field. The partially uncovered skeletons were all placed in the graves supine, in extended positions, and in a west-east direction. The condition of the remains and demographic information are summarized in Appendix 1. The overall preservation of the human bone was good, although a slight degree of fragmentation was observed. The proportion of each skeleton excavated differed between contexts dependant on the disturbance by the trench. Five inhumations contained less than 25% of the elements expected from a human skeleton (e.g. only the legs and feet were uncovered), three burials contained 25–75% of the body, and two skeletons were more than 75% complete.

The skeletons were initially separated into two general age categories: adult (20+ years old) or non-adult (i.e. child, <20 years old), with more precise age ranges estimated wherever possible. Non-adult age was determined using the stages of development of the dentition and the skeletal elements (van Beek 2002; Scheuer and Black 2004). Adult individuals were aged based on the eruption of the third molars (wisdom teeth), and the complete fusion of the long bone epiphyses. The skeletal evidence suggested a broad range of individuals present in the assemblage, from approximately 1 year old to mature adult. The remains of four non-adults (Sk54, 60, 67, 75) and seven adults (Sk53, 62, 64, 96, 73, 77; including one likely “older adult”, 46+ years, Sk56) were present.

The human skeleton primarily develops sexually dimorphic characteristics during puberty, and as a result, examination of the sex of non-adult individuals was not undertaken. Determinations of sex (male, “M”, or female, “F”) were made for all adults (i.e. 20+ years), and were based on the morphology of the cranium, mandible (lower jaw) and pelvis (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994), where available. A designation of “indeterminate” (I) was stated where sex could not be reliably assessed. Of the seven adult inhumations excavated, two females (Sk53, 62) and one male (Sk56) were identified. The sex of the remaining skeletons could not be determined.

Although the general pathology was investigated, only dental observations were made. A large healing abscess affecting the roots of the left first mandibular molar of Sk53 was likely the result of a large carious lesion affecting the majority of the tooth’s crown. Ante-mortem tooth loss of the right mandibular molars of the older adult Sk56 was also recorded.

No further information could be retrieved from this assemblage of skeletal remains.

### *Other grave finds* by Steve Crabb

One small stem of clay pipe was uncovered from Grave 2, and is 19th century in date. 18mm length of a copper alloy pin and a copper alloy four-holed button, 15mm in diameter from Grave 7 were also retained.

## **Conclusion**

Unsurprisingly, human burial practice has been identified within the groundworks. Although only Grave 2 can be tentatively dated, all the burials seem likely to date from the 18th or 19th century. Disused grave stones, used now as the church path, cannot be positively linked to any specific grave but are probably contemporary with the generality of the burials in this location as reference to a number of children is made. Two sherds of Medieval pottery have been recovered from the works. No other archaeological deposits of interest other than Christian interment were encountered.

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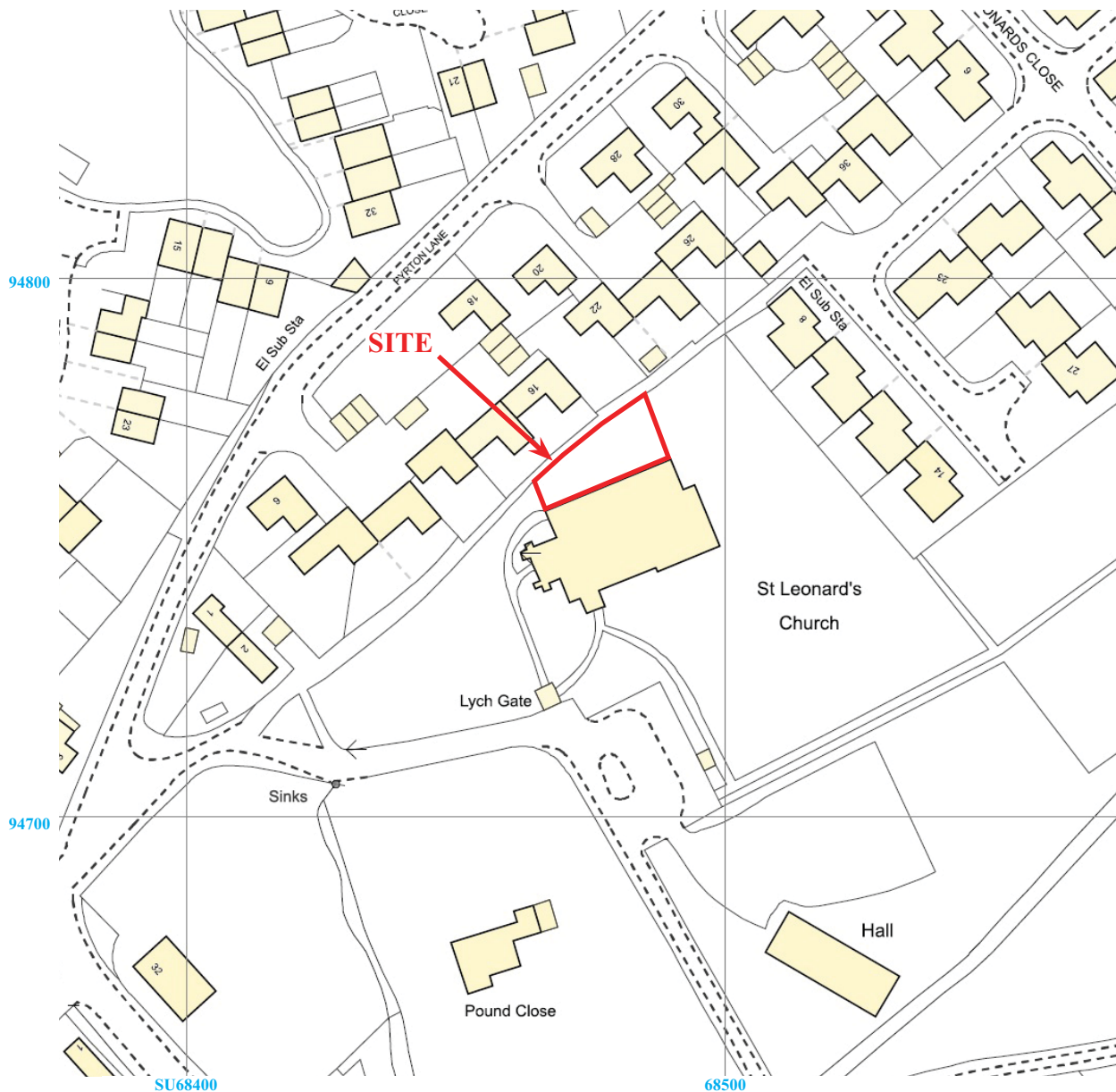
## Appendix 1: Summary of skeletons

<i>Grave</i>	<i>Sk</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	<i>Compl. (%)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Pathology</i>
2	53	supine, extended, W-E	good	25-75	adult	F	large carious lesion of the left first mandibular molar and associated abscess
2	54	supine, extended, W-E	good	75+	c. 1 yea)	n/a	-
3	56	supine, extended, W-E	good	<25	adult (older)	M	antemortem tooth loss of right mandibular molars
5	60	supine, extended, W-E	good	<25	c. 10 year)	n/a	
6	62	supine, extended, W-E	good	25-75	Adult	F	
7	64	supine, extended, E-W	good	<25	adult	I	
9	67	supine, extended, E-W	good	75+	6+ years	n/a	
10	69	supine, E-W	good	<25	adult	I	
11	71	Supine, E-W	fair	<25	adult	I	
12	73	supine, extended, E-W	good	25-75	adult	I	
13	75	supine, extended, E-W	good	<25	non-adult	n/a	
14	77	supine, extended, E-W	good	<25	adult	I	









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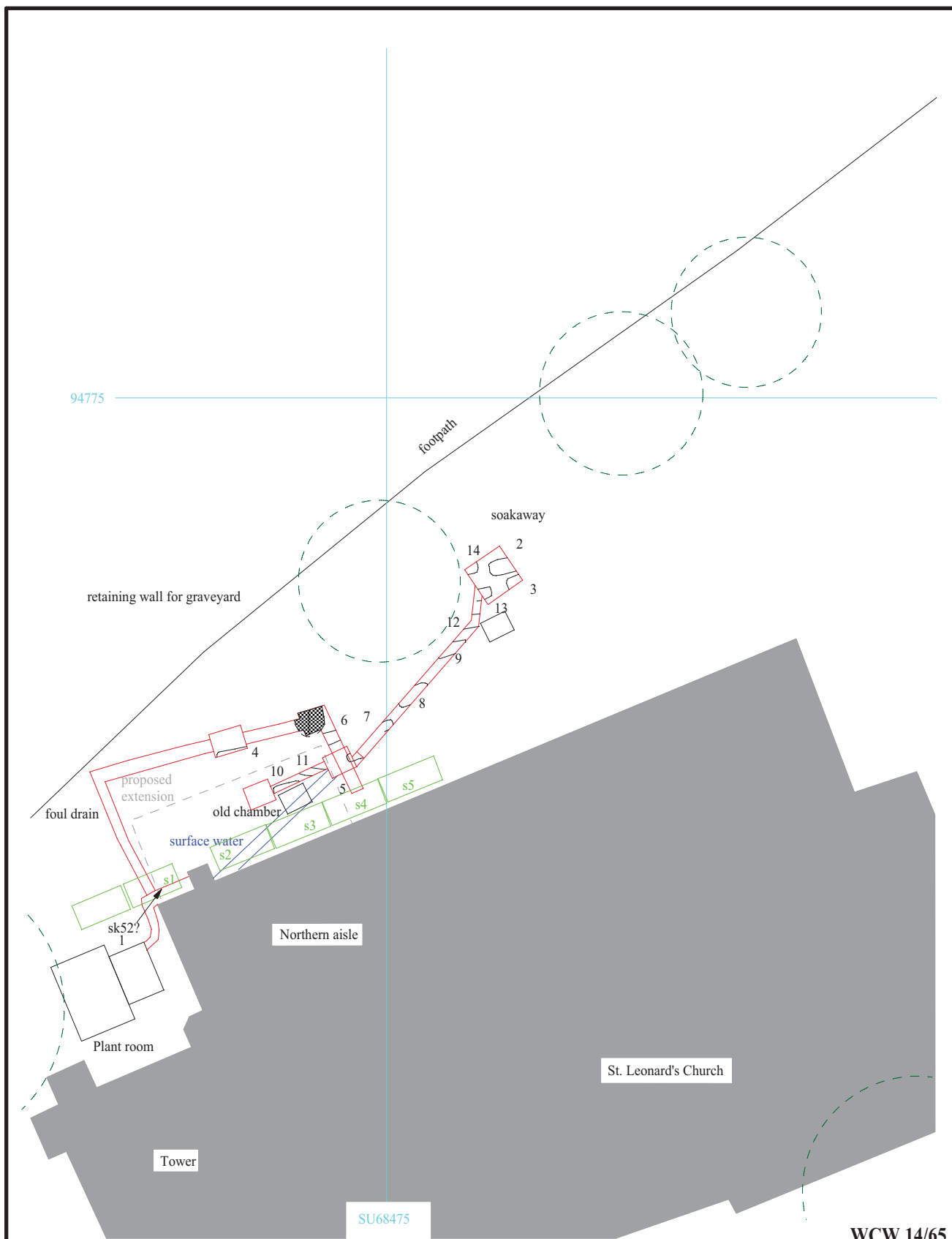


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.

0 10m

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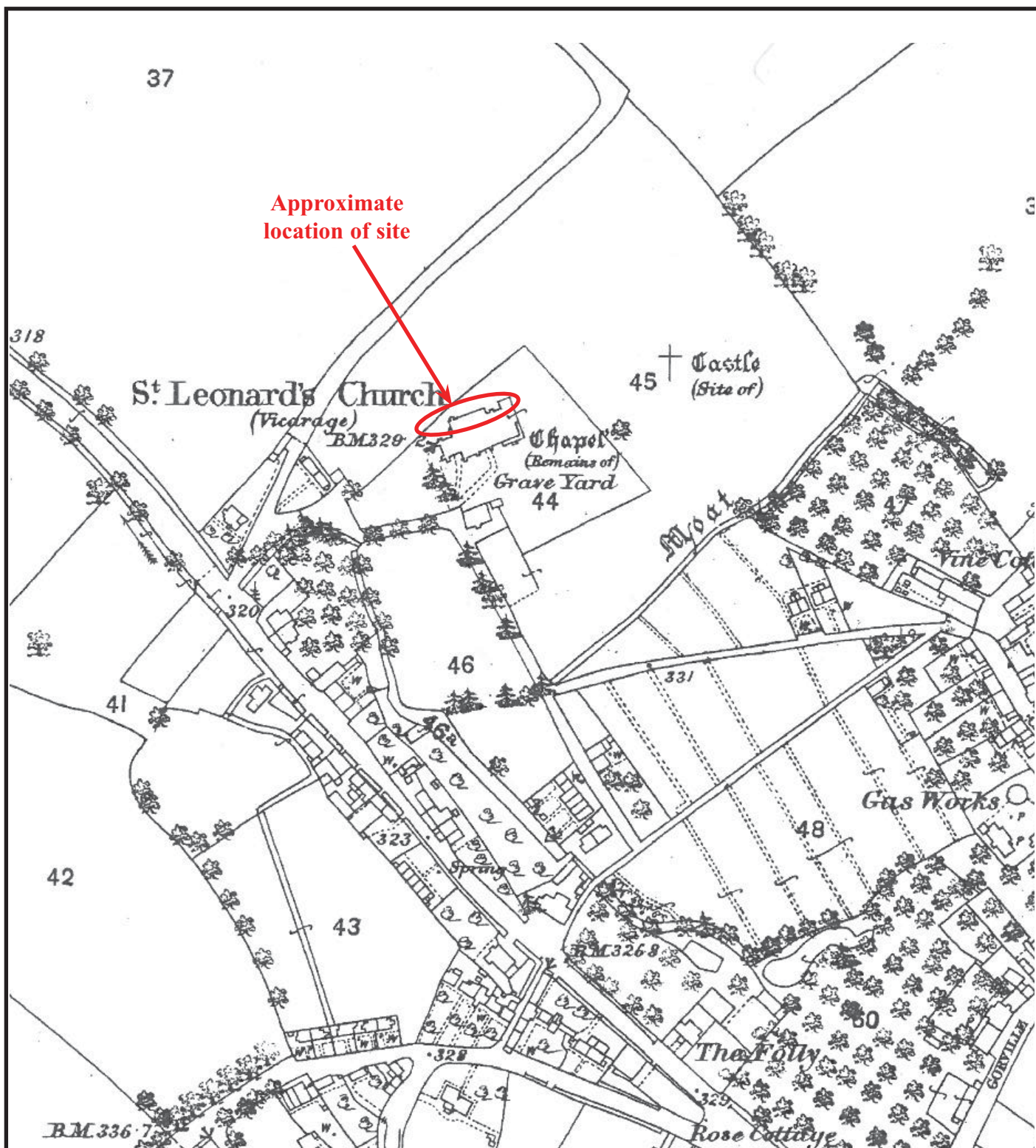
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Figure 4. Enclosure map, 1815.

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Figure 5. First Edition Ordnance Survey, 1876.

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Plate 1. Skeleton 55 in Grave 2, looking north, Scales: 0.5m.



Plate 2. Skeleton 56 in Grave 3, looking south, Scales: 0.1m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Pipe trench, with existing buried chamber in right hand section, looking north east, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Skeleton 64 in Grave 7, looking east, Scales: 0.5m.

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Plate 5. Grave slab 1.



Plate 6. Grave slab 2, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 7. Grave slab 5, Scales: 0.5m.



Plate 8. Buried grave slab, Scales: 1m.

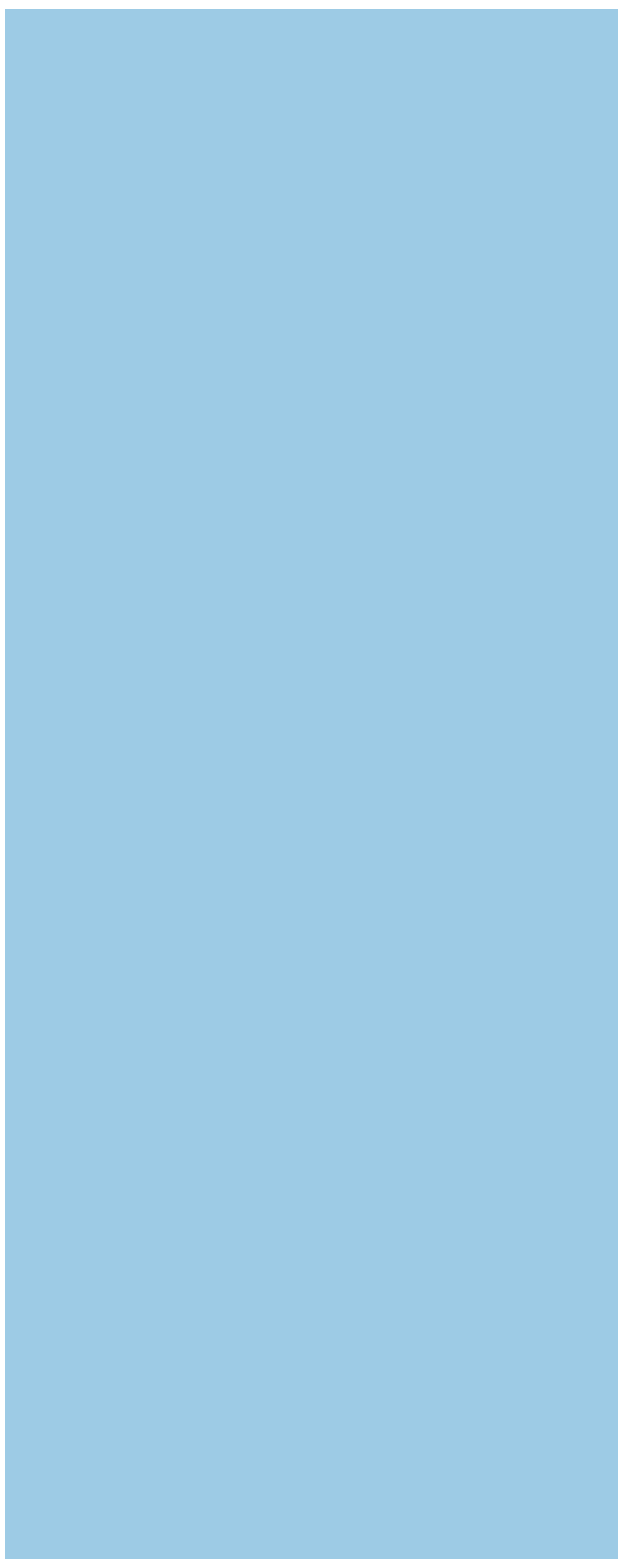
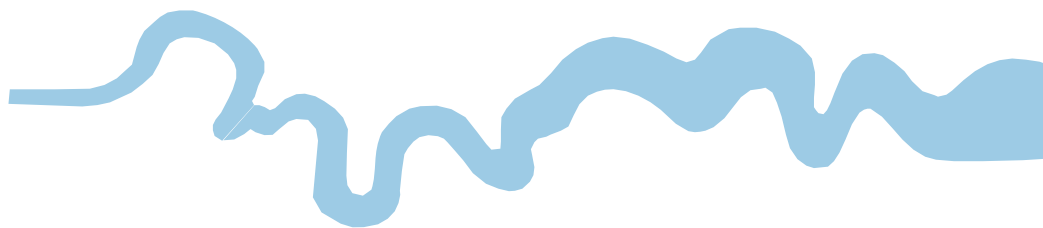
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Plates 5 - 8.

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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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