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S E R V I C E S

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

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Munda

**Site Code: SPC13/13c
(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 13/13c

August 2014

Summary

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

Grid reference: SP 2738 0460

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 24th July - 8th August 2014

Site supervisor: Andrew Mordin

Site code: SPC 13/13

Summary of results: Additional drainage pipe trenching was observed at the northern side of the church. Two separate walls were identified underlying the existing northern children's chapel exterior walls and in total five separate foundation courses of limestone were uncovered. These are thought to be contemporary with the previously uncovered limestone foundation at the site. A ditch, thought to underlie this structure, was also uncovered. These walls are likely to have formed a pre-church stone building of late Saxon or early medieval date, or possibly an unrecorded Roman building.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and paper archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service, with the accession code OXCMS:2014.52. The finds will be returned to the church.

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St Peter's Church, Alvescot, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Munding

Report 13/13c

Introduction

This report documents the results of a third 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 a new toilet, a ground source heat pump, and would also require associated rainwater drainage improvements and new waste water drainage. Archaeological deposits were identified during the excavation of the slab for the new extension (Munding 2013a), and it is thought that more evidence might be uncovered of a possible structure associated with an undated wall that was found on the western side of this excavation, underlying the northern nave wall and tower buttress, along with potential for other deposits relating to Roman, Saxon and medieval pottery previously recovered (Munding 2013a and b). 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 scheme approved by the local planning authority.

This was 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 scheme was based on a brief supplied by Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Coddington 2011), and was approved by him, as archaeological adviser to the District Council. The fieldwork was carried out by Andrew Munding from 24th July to 4th August 2014. The site code is SPC13/13, and this is the third report associated with these works. The first dealt primarily with deposits encountered during excavation of the floor slab (Munding 2013a), and the second with deposits found in the ground source heating duct trenches (Munding 2013b). The paper archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service, with the accession number OXCMS:2014.52, with finds returned to the Church 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. This small village in West Oxfordshire, situated on the B4020, lies south-west of Brize Norton and Carterton, c.2km from the latter's town centre. The underlying geology is Kellaways Sand (BGS 1982) and the top of the graveyard by the new extension 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 are the northern portico, and the nave doorway, both of 13th century date, and interior decoration also of this date. Prior to the works commencing, the northern aspects of the existing church contained a blocked recess on the western facing wall of the exterior northern chapel and a blocked doorway with visible exterior tracery located on the exterior northern nave wall. This recess was broken out during works and uncovered a single-arched trefoil window, Norman in style and probably of 12th-century date (Mundin 2013b). This adds to a number of Early Medieval elements uncovered during Victorian restoration (VCH 2006).

It was thought that this site could contain an earlier chapel, probably Norman, and an even earlier structure than the initial chapel, due to the presence of Roman brick and tile in the general fabric of the church, especially within the fabric of the existing northern chapel. Roman, and even Saxon settlement is thought to exist in a field east of the church at Gillens Close, thought to be the possible site of the original Alvescot settlement (VCH 2006). Roman and Saxon pottery have been uncovered during the previous observations at the Church, mostly from the subsoil (Mundin 2013a), or residual from a later feature (Mundin 2013b).

Like neighbouring parishes in West Oxfordshire, Alvescot parish is long and thin crossing a variety of soils, with the church towards the centre (VCH 2006). It is thought that during the Anglo-Saxon period this land was controlled by Bampton, which would have been a large manor under royal ownership (VCH 2006). If earlier settlement exists it may lie under the ridge and furrow in the adjoining fields to the church. The population would have been greatly affected by the Black Death in the 14th century, with several dispersed hamlets in the Medieval parish completely abandoned by the 16th century, leaving the current settlement to grow by the Lechlade to Bampton road in the 17th century (VCH 2006). *Elfegecote* is mentioned in Domesday Book (Williams and Martin 2002), and from the 11th century, Alwoldsbury seems to be historically the larger settlement, which also included Alvescot, Bromscott and Pemcott and Puttes (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 features reflect gravel working between the church and the mill leat. An enclosed manor house lies to the north, close to the mill, probably dated between the late 12th century and 14th century. This also probably moved from a closer position to the church (VCH 2006). This field is referred to on historic maps as the 'Old Court Grounds'. A visible east-west linear hollow, or routeway exists on the northern side of the church yard, running eastwards.

Recent work at the church, has reflected this early use of the site of the church and surrounds. Along with this evidence, four 18th/19th-century brick-lined crypts were discovered, three of which were recorded. One of those, of Catherine Neate, whose grave slab was lifted at the start of the works, will be repositioned just outside the new extension. A broken grave stone, probably an Early Medieval type, was found within rubble backfill from an earlier wall underlying the exterior nave wall (Mundin 2013a). Parts of undisturbed Medieval, even possibly Saxon, human burials were identified west of the current Church during ducting pipe trenching (Mundin 2013b). Ditch sections were also investigated in pipe trenching north and west of the tower during these works. These features seem to be at least of 13th century date (Mundin 2013b).

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, and returned to the Church for reburial. Other finds were to be retained for further study, and again returned for later deposition with the Church.

The trenching was carried out largely with a Kubota-type mechanical excavator, along the exterior edge of the northern exterior church walls. The existing foundation of the church were also hand cleaned and photographically recorded. All machine works were undertaken with a bladed bucket.

Results

Drainage trenching

A length of pipe trench roughly 0.7m deep and 0.6m wide was observed. This trench linked the downpipe at the north west corner of the northern chapel with an inspection pit which had been dug during the previous phase of groundworks. The top of one SW-NE aligned feature (14) was uncovered within this trench (Fig 4). The fill of this feature was a firm dark brown clayey silt fill with occasional charcoal and limestone flecks (69). One small

piece of Roman pottery rim sherd was uncovered, and two sherds of 11th-century pottery and one Roman in date came from the overburden above this. This trench lay adjacent to the exterior foundation of the northern portico, uncovering its face along the north wall. A perpendicular limestone block foundation (wall 70; Pl. 1) was uncovered partially underlying the corner buttress (Fig. 2). This wall was at least three courses deep and extended below the excavated trench depth of 0.7m. The top course was 0.42m from the top of the section. Each course was 0.12m thick, including bonding. It extended northwards from the north wall of the northern portico at a roughly 90° angle.

The trench was extended eastwards, uncovering the exterior foundation of the north exterior wall of the north portico. It was seen to curve outwards slightly, even with the above wall straight, offset from vertical by 0.15m northwards. This exposed north portico foundation measured 5.4m in length. Once the north-east corner of the chapel wall was reached the cross section of the underlying wall (71) was encountered under loose stone rubble (fill 72 within robber cut 15) at a depth of 0.65m. The trench was continued eastwards to run in front of the north-western corner of the exterior foundation for the sacristy (Fig. 2). *In situ* stones for the wall were uncovered from the first course at the base of excavation (Pl.2). A drain was sunk within the base of the old boiler room slab that exists to the south. Natural clay was directly under the thin slab. An existing small grill cover drained the top of the step above the slab. This drain lead to a soakaway positioned to the north.

This trench was excavated to a depth of 0.9m. The top of another limestone foundation was encountered (73) (Pl.3). Though loose rubble was encountered, especially over the corner point just below the turf of the graveyard, *in situ* foundation was only recorded 0.56m below the top of the section. The corner of this wall projected eastwards out of the trench, and it was recorded to turn north at 3.3m along the trench. Two courses existed. This portion of the wall needed to be removed to allow the pipe in the trench to reach the soakaway location in the existing church path.

At the location of the soakaway within the church path, a feature was noted in section (16). It was uncertain if this was a pit, or a continuation of ditch 14 seen to the west. If it was this continuation, it would underlie the foundations at this point, and wall 70 (assuming this continued further to the north). The top of the feature was 0.4m deep in section and no deeper than 0.65m in section. It was 0.55m wide. It was filled with a dark brown clayey silt with charcoal fleck and limestone inclusions. It contained animal bone from both horse and cattle. One sherd of Roman pottery was uncovered from the overburden just above this feature, and could be derived from the ditch's backfill.

The only works to occur to the south of the church, was a replacement drainage trench and soakaway, draining a downpipe of the corner of the exterior nave wall and eastern portico wall (Fig.2; Pl.4). These works broke out the previous pipe that discharged rainwater into the ground, with a new pipe laid to a depth of 0.4m. Underlying 0.27m of previous pipe trench backfill, in which a 1931 coin was uncovered, rubble overburden was encountered. This was observed within the base of the pipe trench and within the section of the soakaway on the church path. The base of the soakaway was 0.83m deep. No natural geology was reached. A single fragment of green-glazed ridge tile was uncovered at the base this excavation. No other deposits were encountered in this trench.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 6 sherds with a total weight of 90g. Utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor and Oakley 1984; Mellor 1994), four sherds were recovered from the subsoil at two different location. These were of local Cotswold-type ware, dated between AD975-1350, weighing 47g.

In addition, two small sherds of Roman material (5g and 4g) and a sherd of Iron Age pottery (37g) in a sparse fine shell fabric 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.

Animal bone by Ceri Falys

Fifteen pieces of animal bone were recovered from the section of Cut 16. Six fragments re-fit into a single 3rd horse metatarsal. The remaining fragments were cattle, including several pieces of a right tibia and a complete right talus.

Metal finds

A piece of unidentifiable, slightly curved metal (34g) was uncovered from Ditch slot 14. Its context suggests it is of Roman date. A George V penny was recovered from the southern soakaway trench in the upper homogenous disturbance created by the backfilling of the previous drainage at this location. It was in good condition, with no sign of surface wear, and probably was new when lost. It is dated 1931 with Britannia on the reverse, and reads on the obverse **GEORGIUS V DEI GRA:BRITT:OMN:REX FID:DEF:IND:IMP:** surrounding the profile of the king's head.

Other finds

One other fragment of non-descript ceramic tile was uncovered from 50 in the northern soakaway trench, and weighed 8g. A single fragment of exterior green-glazed ridge tile, which would usually come from a high status building was found in the rubble overburden in the southern soakaway excavation. It weighed 161g and is generally early Medieval in date.

Conclusion

The fieldwork has observed remains that relate to use of the site prior to construction of the current church. Documentary sources say a chapel was originally built at Alvescot in the early 12th century (VCH 2006). Though difficult to interpret, due to the confined nature of the trenches, features of early medieval and possibly even late Saxon (11th century) date have been found. Documentary sources also suggest that the church may be the site of a potential earlier manor (VCH 2006), so this structure could also be a part of a manorial complex. A further possibility is that it could be an as yet unrecorded Roman building though the Roman pottery sherds from the site are few and small and less likely to reflect the presence of a significant Roman settlement immediately close by. The ditch features may be a continuation of the extensive landscape of medieval earthworks situated north of the church under the later medieval ridge and furrow.

References

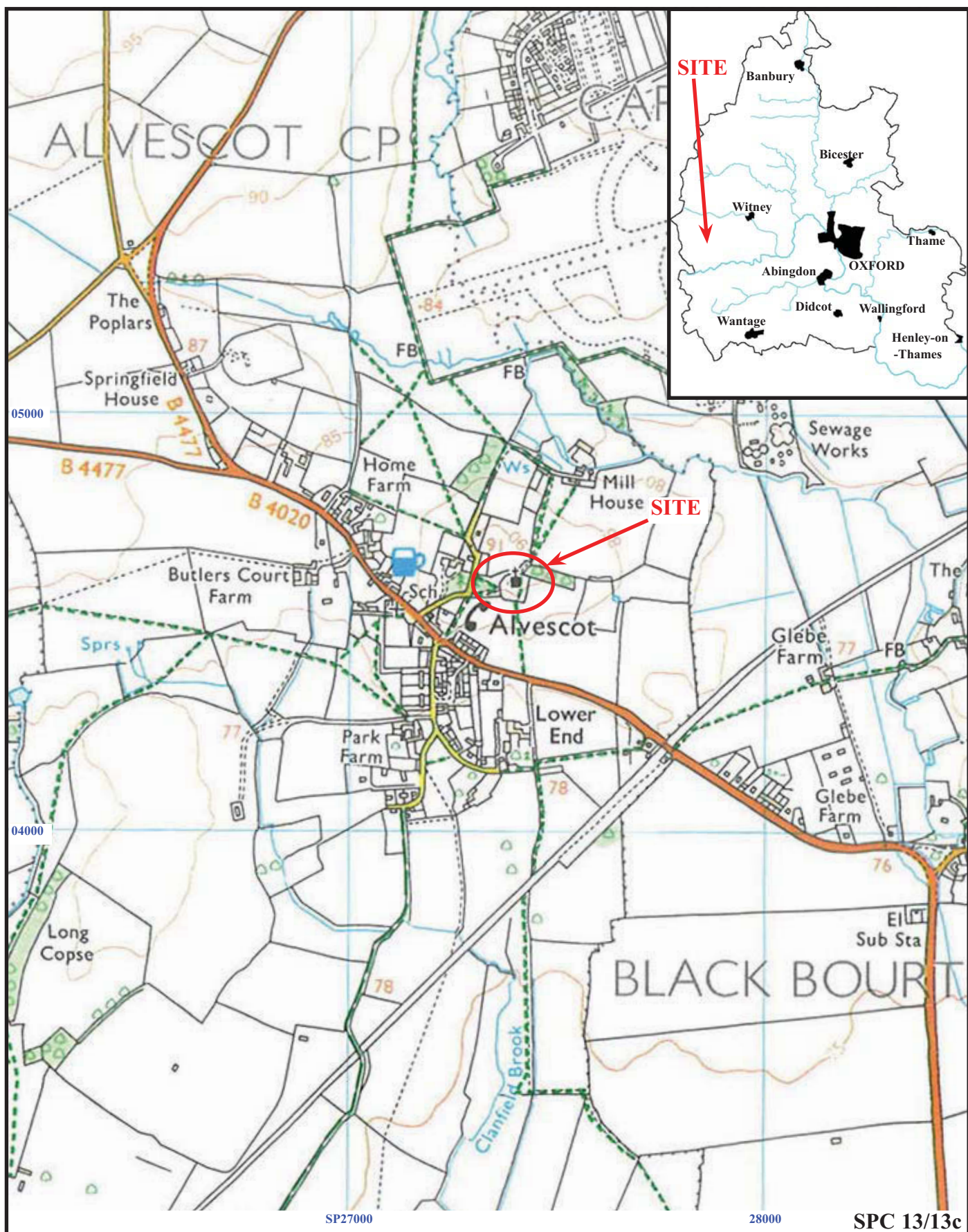
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APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of features excavated

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
14	69	Ditch	Roman?	Pottery
	70	Wall		
	71	Wall		
15	72	Robber cut		
	73	Wall		
16	74	Ditch?	Roman?	Same as 14

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

Cut	Fill	<i>IA</i>		<i>RB</i>		<i>OXAC</i>		<i>OXY</i>	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
	50			1	5	2	4		
	Soakaway north					2	43		
	South Soakaway	1	37						
14	69			1	4				
	Total	1	37	2	9	4	47		

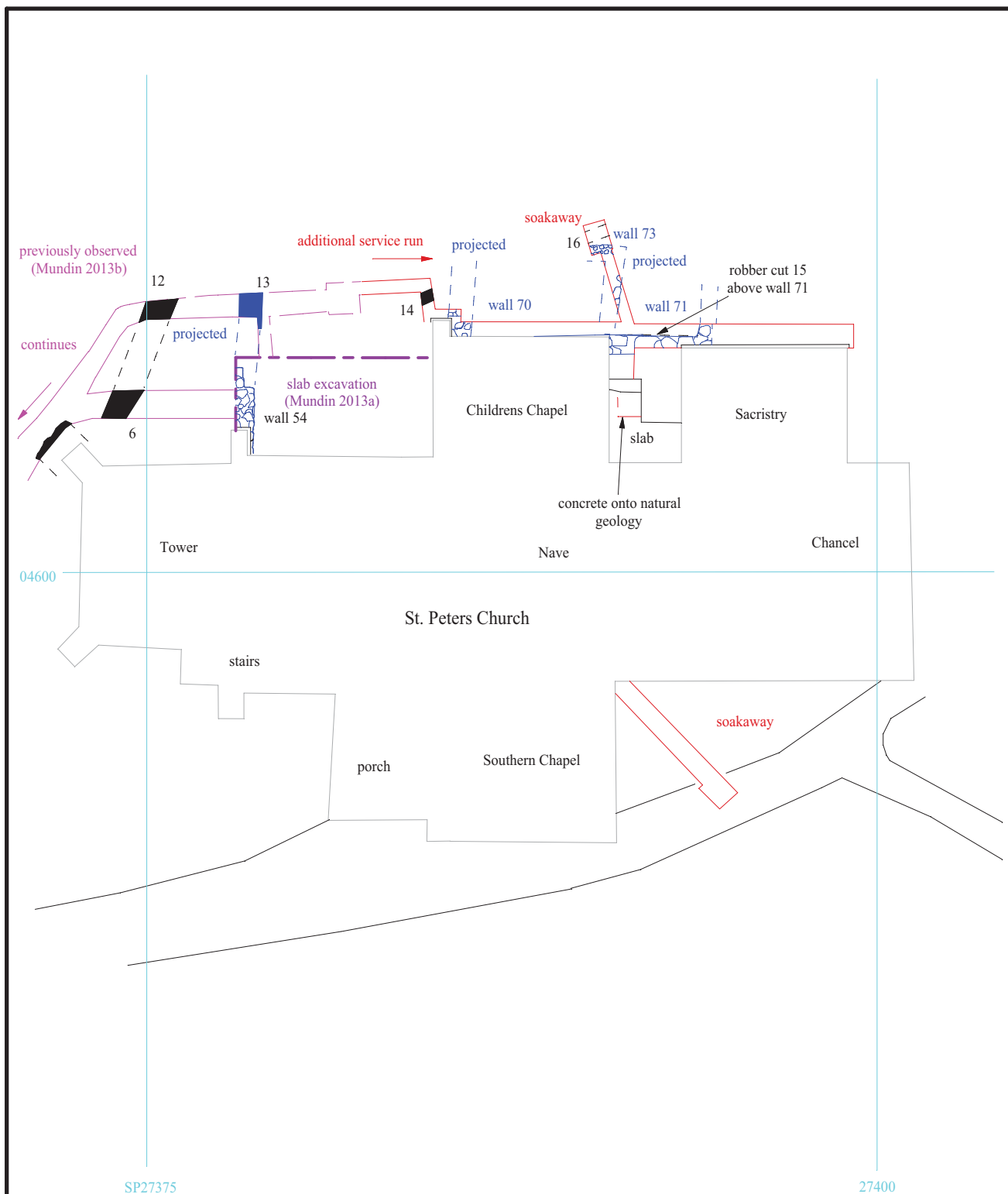


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Figure 1. Location of site within Alvescot and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detail of drainage trenching.



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Plate 1. Wall 70, projecting out of north portico, looking south, Scales: 0.5m.



Plate 2. Wall 71, looking south, Scales: 0.5m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Wall 73, in northern soakaway trench, looking north, Scales: horizontal 1m, vertical, 0.5m.



Plate 4. Southern soakaway off exterior southern nave downpipe, looking north west, Scales: 1m.

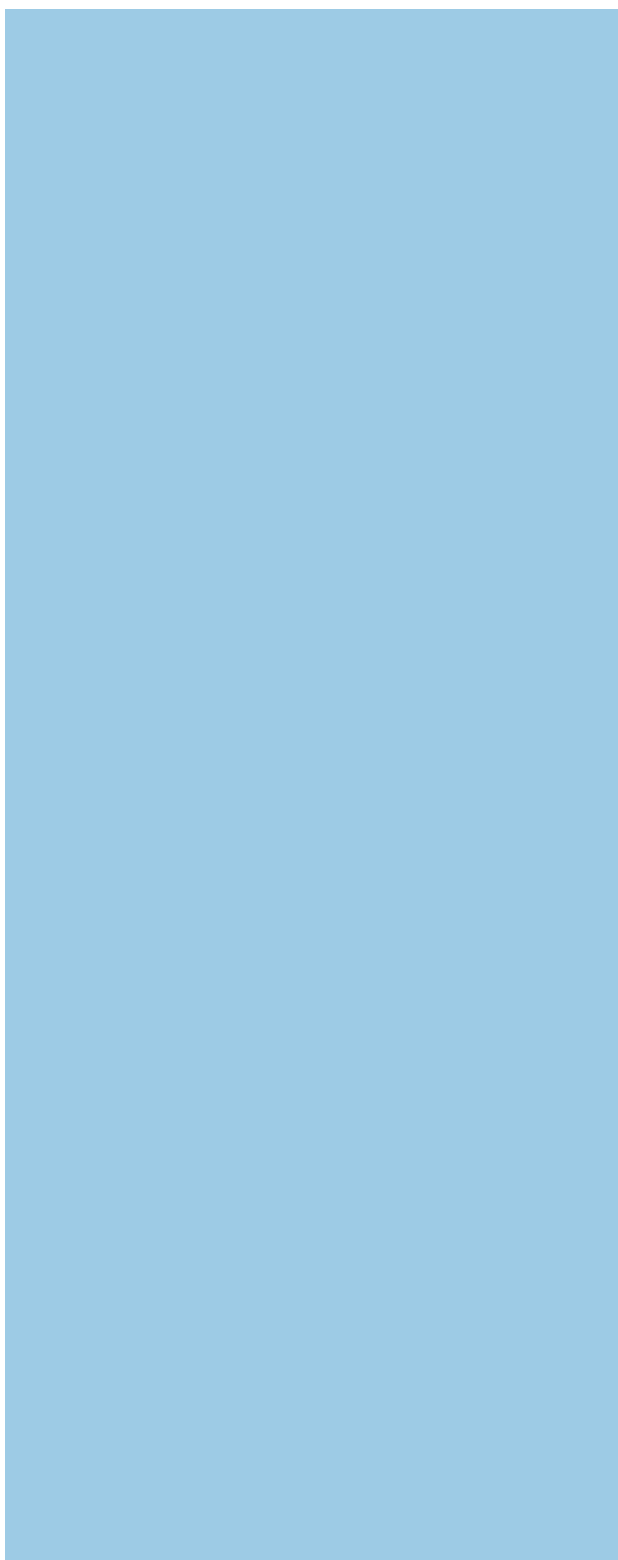
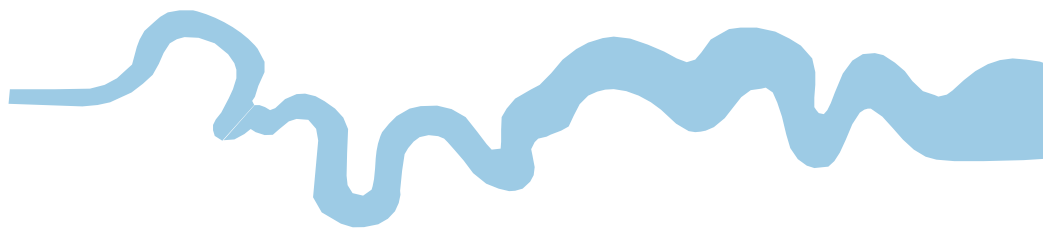
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Plates 3 - 4.

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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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