

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Church of St Lawrence, Church Street,
Alton, Hampshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Genni Elliott

Site Code: LCA17/120

(SU 7172 3960)

Church of St Lawrence, Church Street, Alton, Hampshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
For St Lawrence Parochial Church Council**

by Genni Elliott
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code LCA 17/120

July 2017

Summary

Site name: Church of St Lawrence, Church Street, Alton, Hampshire

Grid reference: SU 7172 3960

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 13th June 2017

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Genni Elliott

Site code: LCA 17/120

Summary of results: Three brick-lined graves were recorded to the north of the church. Human bones were returned to the church to be re-interred.

Monuments identified: Graves

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Hampshire Cultural Trust in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 13.07.17
	Steve Preston ✓ 11.07.17

Church of St Lawrence, Church Street, Alton, Hampshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Genni Elliott

Report 17/120

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Church of St Lawrence, Church Street, Alton, Hampshire (SU 7172 3960) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Toby Pitt of West Country Tiling Company, Marsh Farm, Blatchbridge, Frome, Somerset, BA11 5EL on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of the Church of St Lawrence, Alton. A faculty has been obtained from the Diocese of Winchester for the insertion of new drainage and soakaways on the south and north side of the church. This is subject to a condition which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Genni Elliott, on the 13th June 2017 and the site code is LCA 17/120. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Hampshire Cultural Trust in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located just to the north-west of the centre of Alton on the west side of Church Street (Fig. 2). The east side of the church fronts onto Church Street whilst to the north, west and south is the graveyard. Part of the graveyard has been incorporated into the grounds of the adjacent school to the north-west. The site is approximately level and a benchmark on the church is at 113.71m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is recorded as River Terrace Deposits 2: Sand and Gravel above Zig Zag Chalk Member (BGS 1999). The underlying geology consisted of brownish orange gravel.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location at the parish church which is usually considered to lie at the centre of the historic core of a settlement, though in this case, the church lies away from the main thoroughfare of the medieval town. The church may have had late Saxon origins as one is recorded in Domesday Book of 1086 (HCC 2002; Williams and Martin 2002). It may have been a Minster church at this time. The current building has early medieval (12th century) origins but was comprehensively rebuilt in the 15th century. The church and churchyard were made defensible in the civil war. The church is Grade I Listed and described as:

‘Mainly C15, but base of the tower Norman. C19 spire. Original nave now the south aisle. Jacobean pulpit.’

Objectives and methodology

The general aims of the project were to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the digging of the soakaway and drainage trench. The project’s specific aims were:

- to determine the extent to which human remains survive within soakaway and drainage trench; and
- to observe the presence of graves and vaults.

The trenches and soakaway to the south of the church had already been dug and backfilled prior to archaeological monitoring as had a soakaway on the north side of the church. The drainage channels on the north side of the church were open upon arrival and part of the second soakaway had been excavated. The remainder of the soakaway was excavated by a 360° digger under constant archaeological supervision (Fig. 3). Machine excavation halted when burials were encountered. These were recorded and where necessary lifted and handed over to the church for reburial. Spoil heaps were monitored for finds.

Results

The Drainage Trench

The drainage trench ran along the north side of the church before turning to the east and extending into the graveyard area (Fig. 3). It was 0.40m wide by 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.18m of topsoil including grass over a mid-greyish brown sandy clay loam. Within the spoil heap at the north-west end of the church a 17th-century seal was found with a pendant attachment.

The Soakaway

The soakaway was located within the graveyard on the north side of the church (Figs. 3 and 4) The initial trench measured 4.80m long by 1.80m wide by 1.05m deep. This was further extended to the west by 1m in order to avoid two brick-lined graves (Pls 1-3).

The stratigraphy consisted of 0.18m of topsoil (50) including grass over 0.87m of mid-greyish brown, sandy clay loam with frequent stones and mortar inclusions (51). Within layer 51 were sherds of transfer-printed ‘china’ (plate and bowl) and Verwood pottery. Cut through this, though the cut was not seen due to being backfilled with the same material, were graves 1 and 2 (Fig. 4).

Crypt Grave 1 was aligned east-west, was six-sided in plan and lined with bricks, 12 courses high. The bricks were laid in stretcher bond, bonded with a sandy lime mortar and measured 215mm x 110mm x 62mm (8 ½” x 4 ¼” x 2 ½”). The bricks themselves were not frogged and were well fired, in an orangey red colour with stone inclusions. Internally the grave was a maximum of 0.75m wide by 2.13m long by 1.04m deep. Contained within the grave was skeleton 53. Skeleton 53 was aligned west-east and laid supine. Only the lower leg bones were seen; these were from an adult. Along the northern edge of the grave there appeared to be the remains of a wooden coffin. Lying parallel to grave 1 and to the south was a second brick-vaulted grave; though this had been covered back prior to the watching brief.

Grave 2 was located to the west of grave 1 within the extended part of the trench. The grave was also aligned east-west and cut through layer 51. The top of the grave was denoted by a layer of bricks forming a vaulted roof. These bricks were trapezoidal in shape measuring 222mm x 111mm by a maximum thickness of 60mm (8 ¾” x 4 ¼” x 2 ¼”). There were no walls, brick or otherwise to the grave. The grave was more than 1.0m long, with only the eastern end exposed, by 1.10m wide by 0.97m deep. Contained within the grave was skeleton 55. Skeleton 55 was aligned east-west and laid supine. Part of the pelvis and femur were exposed as well as the humerus and lower arm. The pelvis indicated that the skeleton was an adult male. The grave was backfilled by context 56, a mid-greyish brown, sandy clay loam, essentially the same as layer 51. In the vicinity of the grave was found a copper alloy button with the words ‘treble gilt’ on the reverse.

Finds

The Seal by Genni Elliott

A fob seal with an open mounted frame in leaded copper alloy and an oval intaglio face on a carnelian stone (Pl. 4). The face consists of a heraldic shield with a pointed tip and a central point at the top. Within the shield is the letter ‘S’ and a single short straight vertical line that could be an ‘I’, or a rod or baton. Down either side of the shield is a line of flowers and above the shield is a garland. It is likely to date to the 17th century.

Conclusion

Within soakaway 1 a total of three graves were identified with two exposed. All three were aligned east-west and were placed within two rows with a ‘path’ between them. All the graves had a brick vaulted roof and grave 1 also had brick walls. Grave 2 did not have the walls and the third grave was not exposed by the groundworkers below the roof level.

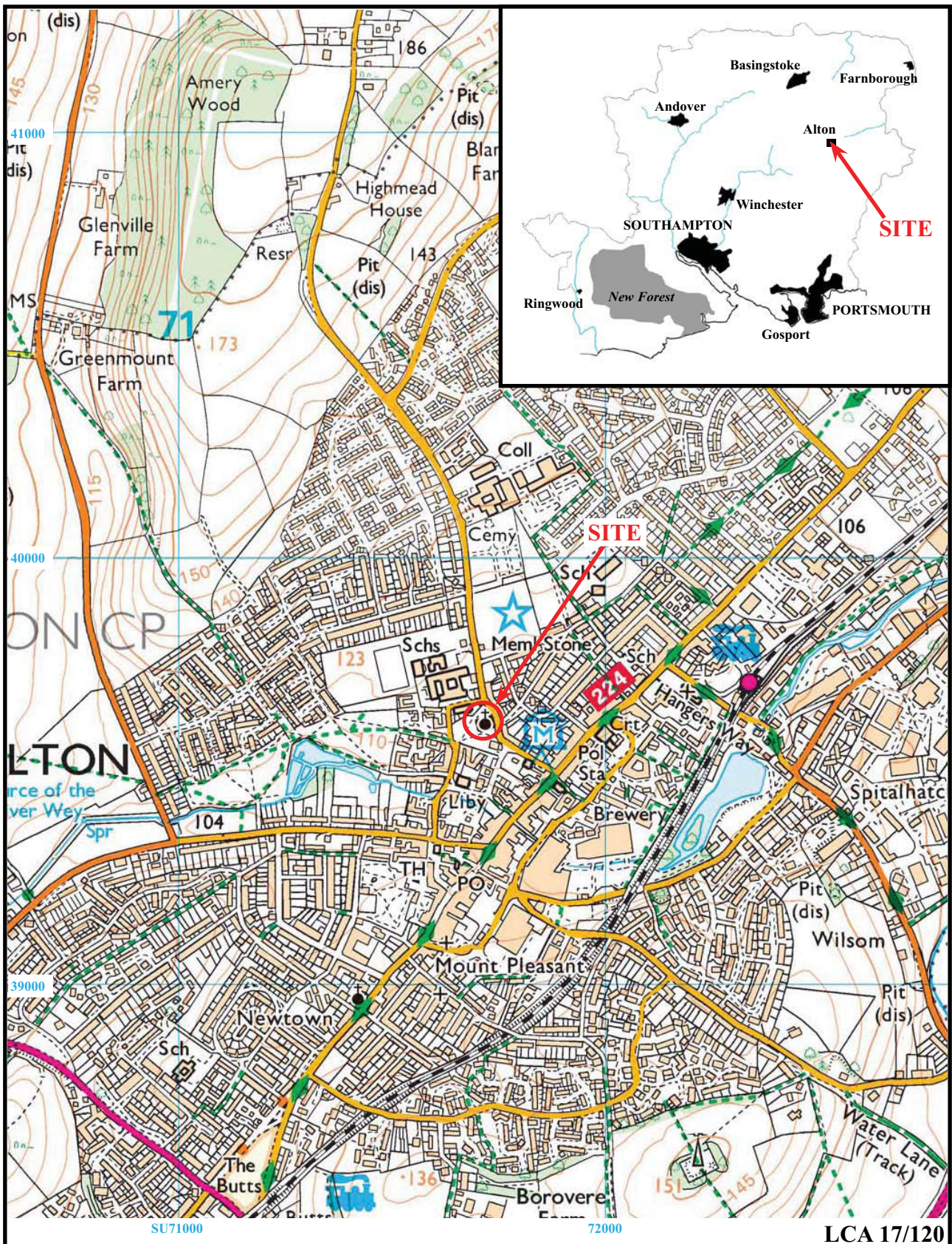
References

BGS, 1999, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50, 000, Sheet 300, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth

HCC, 2002, *Alton: An extensive urban survey of Hampshire's and the Isle of Wight's Historic Towns.*

Hampshire County Council, Winchester

Williams, A and Martin, G H, 2002, *Domesday Book, a complete translation*, London



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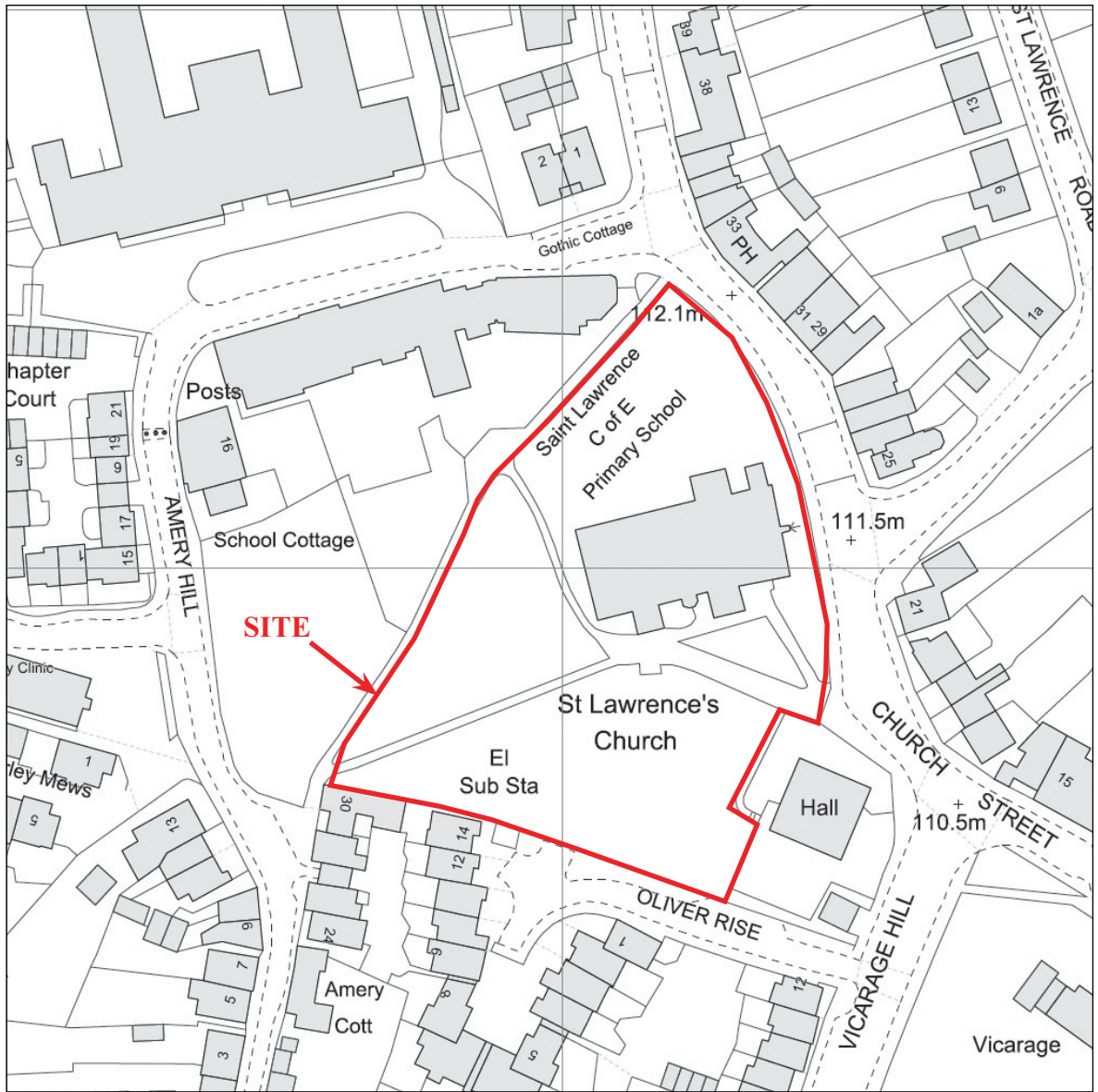
Figure 1. Location of site within Alton and Hampshire.

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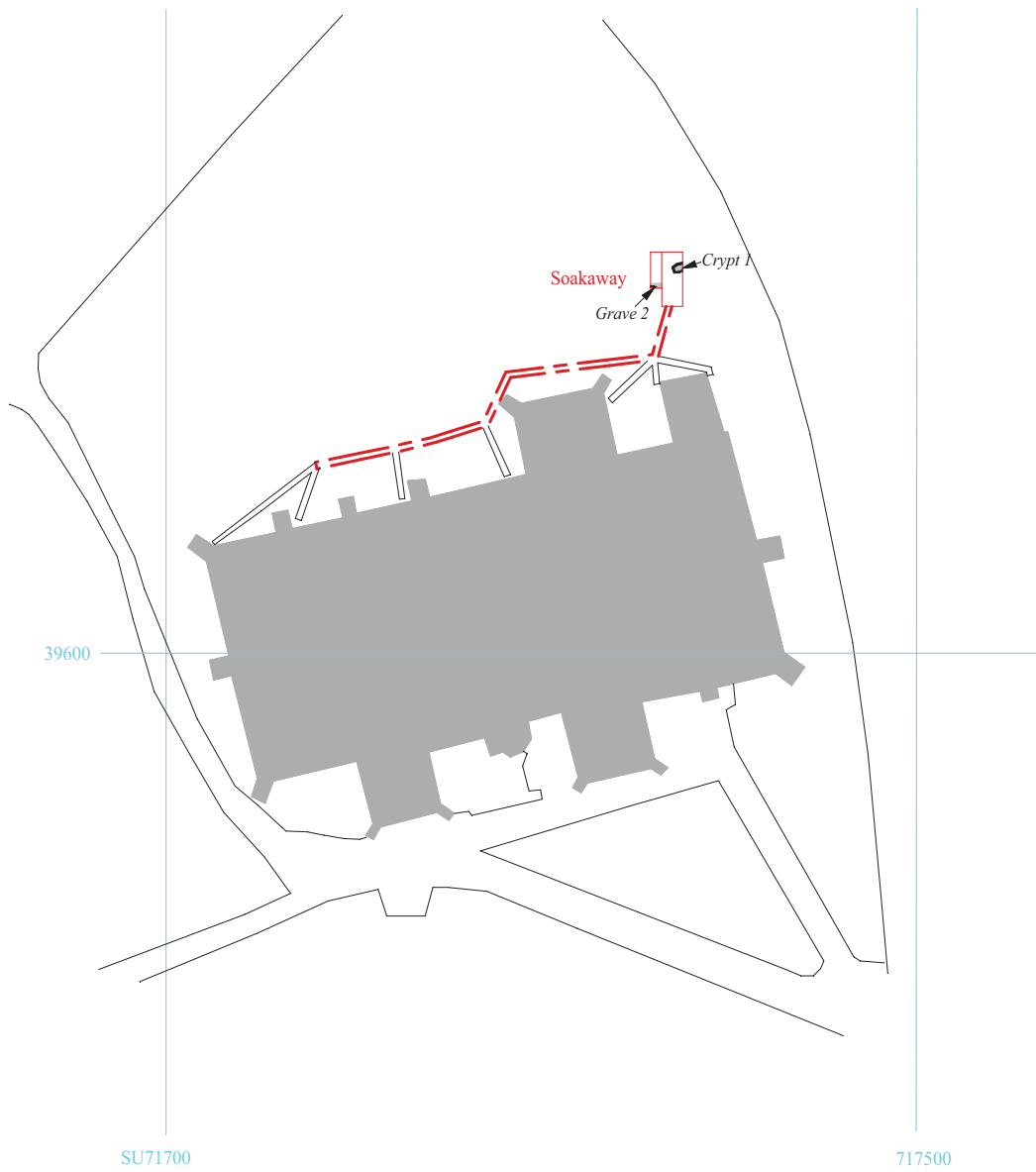
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Church Street.

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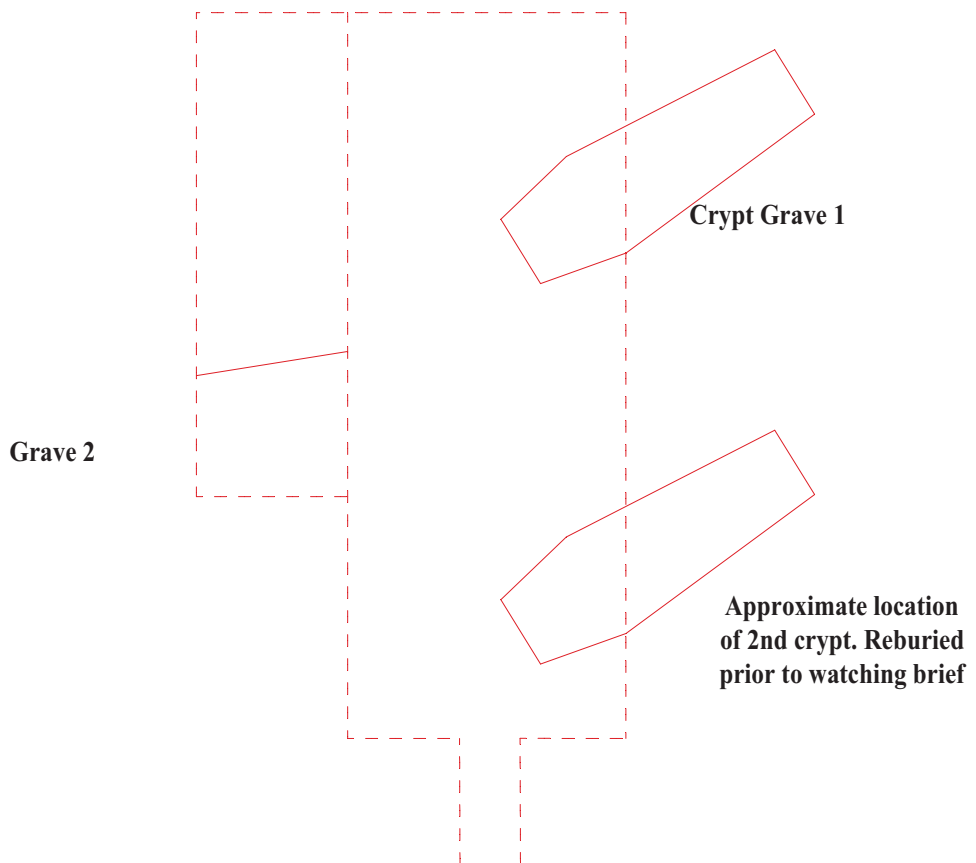
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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.



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Figure 4. Trench plan.



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Plate 1. Soakaway 1, showing crypt 1 and grave 2, looking west south west.



Plate 2. Grave 2 looking west.

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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Soakaway 1, Detail of crypt 1 and grave 2, looking east.



30mm

Plate 4. Wax seal located in drainage trenching.

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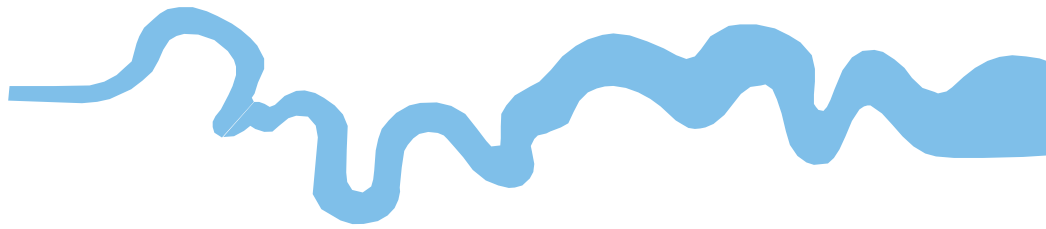
Parish Church of St Lawrence, Church Street,
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Plates 3 and 4.

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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 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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





**Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd,
47-49 De Beauvoir Road,
Reading RG1 5NR**

**Tel: 0118 9260552
Email: tvas@tvas.co.uk
Web: www.tvas.co.uk**

*Offices in:
Brighton, Taunton, Stoke-on-Trent and Ennis (Ireland)*