

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**St Mary the Virgin Church, Wootton,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Site Code: WCW20/143

(SP 4390 1987)

St Mary the Virgin Church, Wootton, Woodstock, Oxfordshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
For the Incumbent and the Parochial Church Council**

by Andrew Muddin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WCW 20/143

September 2020

Summary

Site name: St Mary the Virgin Church, Wootton, Woodstock, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 4390 1987

Site activity: Archaeological Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 16th - 24th September 2020

Site supervisor: Andrew Muddin

Site code: WCW 20/143

Area of site: c.74 sq m

Summary of results: Archaeological observations were made during the excavation of a new service trench, north-west of the north aisle and tower. The investigation of an existing drainage pipe linked up beyond the west boundary, uncovered partly articulated human remains at over 1m depth. Fragments of disarticulated human bone were encountered during the excavation of the drainage trench. Quantities were small and fragmentary throughout the excavation, with the potential of articulated remains only below 1m deep.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service or Archaeological Data Service (ADS) in due course

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 02.10.20
	Steve Preston ✓ 02.10.20

St Mary the Virgin Church, Wootton, Woodstock, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Report 20/143

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief at St Mary the Virgin Church, Wootton, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1DX (SP 4390 1987) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Zoe Sawbridge of Acanthus Clews Architects, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE, on behalf of the Incumbent and the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

A Faculty has been gained from the Diocese of Oxford to reorder the interior of the Church. The existing pews in the western nave were removed, making provision for a new heating system and removal of existing wooden suspended floor. In the north aisle, there is to be provision for a new servery covered with an extension of this new floor. A new foul drain was required in the churchyard, linking to the existing sewer.

As part of conditions regarding the new development, the Diocese Archaeological Adviser recommended that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the course of works that could expose archaeologically sensitive fabric or deposits. The excavation of the pipe trench in the churchyard has the potential of uncovering human remains, requiring an archaeologist to mitigate any impact to them or prevent their destruction. Any buried structural deposits will require recording, such as exposed foundations or crypt structures.

The fieldwork was carried out to a written scheme of investigation submitted to the Archaeological adviser to the Diocese. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Muddin from 16th to 24th September 2020. The site code is WCW 20/143.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service or Archaeological Database Service (ADS) in due course. All human bone and finds were retained for reburial on site.

Location, topography and geology

St Mary's Church (a Grade II* listed building; 1052899) is central to the village of Wootton in West Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The village lies north-west of the confluence of the River Glyme and the River Dorn. It is also close to the course of *Akeman Street*, a Roman road which lies *c.*1km away, crossing the south-east of the parish. The

church sits north of Church Street and the late 18th- to 19th-century core of village form around Chapel Hill and Church Street (Fig. 2). The churchyard is enclosed with some reuse of the NW churchyard for modern burial. The 18th-century former vicarage, Wootton Place (also listed, Grade II; 1367997), borders the site to the east. The underlying geology is Great Oolite Limestone (White Limestone) (BGS 1968), north of the Glyme river valley. The site lies at a height of 106m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Archaeological background

The archaeological background to the environs of the site is notable for the late Iron Age earthwork complex, known collectively as Grim's Ditch and parts of which are scheduled monuments (SAM 1012907). It is thought to be the defensive works of an oppidum (proto-urban site), but the focus ODF such a site has not yet been located. There are remains of Roman settlement including a villa at Callow's Hill (SAM 1014750) (Copeland 2002, 65). There is record that Wootton was an administrative centre (a Hundred) in Saxon times, of which the church would have been an important centre. It became part of the royal manor of Woodstock, with which it was combined in the 13th century (Banbury *et al* 2010, 136). It was head of a Rural Deanery from the 12th century, included the now deserted medieval settlements of Dornford and Hordley (VCH 1983).

There is believed to have been a church at this location from at least the 12th century (Brooks and Sherwood 2017, 574). Of the present building itself, the nave is 13th century, though with fabric of 16th century and later date. The tower buttresses were repaired in 1730 and there was other repair to the overall stonework (of pinkish limestone) of early 19th century date. A vestry is now formed within the tower, though a blocked doorway on the north side of the chancel is what is left of a structure removed in 1889. This replaced a vestry in the north aisle, after that was shortened in 1825 (VCH 1983). The shortening of the north aisle, also removing the stairs to a west gallery. This location is now effectively within the modern brick boiler house.

The main Victorian restoration (1876) created additional support of the nave walls on both sides. The churchyard was substantially extended to the north (Fig. 2). There are several groups of important monuments to local families, such as Southam and Ponsonby, in the 'historic churchyard'; inside in the chancel, Lee and Crisp families and the Gregory family in the north aisle. Two groups of early 18th century ledgerstones overlay the Victorian heating duct in the central and west nave.

Objectives and methodology

The aims of the project were to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the drainage work in the churchyard. This involved monitoring areas of intrusive groundworks limited in the exterior to the NW churchyard only. The excavation of the new service trench was to be observed and supervised along its route to minimise impact to articulated human burial. The test pits and the new service trench were excavated using hand tools. Monitoring of works in the interior was minimal, though focussed on recording the exposure of any earlier floor by lifting the suspended floor after the late 19th-century pews had been removed. The aim was to record structural deposits (masonry and/or upper parts of vault structures) within or at the base of the 'void', if present.

Results

Exterior works (Figs 3 and 4)

Monitoring focussed on three elements in the exterior, north and west of the tower at the church's west end: two test pits and a pie trench.

Test Pit 1

Test pit 1 was excavated to the north of the tower. It was on a N-S axis and designed to identify the course of an existing drainage run westwards from the west end wall of the north aisle. A service cover was beyond the west boundary of the churchyard, suggesting the pipe was at a depth of 0.7m. The soil level in the churchyard was slightly higher than that on the other side of the wall.

Test Pit 1 was 1.2m x 0.85m and 1.4m deep. Turf and dark brown silt topsoil (50) was removed by hand to a depth of 0.35m, exposing a 350mm diameter ceramic pipe on a WSW-ENE axis at 0.25m deep. This was believed to have been a stoke flue to the boiler room and was not removed during the excavation. Two sherds of transfer-printed, white 'china' were discovered within this fill which also contained occasional sub-angular limestone and very occasional broken brick.

Beyond 0.35m the lower fill was a homogenous graveyard deposit (51); a mix of yellow-brown clay and light yellow-brown silt with moderate inclusions of sub-angular limestone rubble, not shaped in any way. At a depth of 1.04m fragmentary bone was encountered near the east section towards the base of excavation. This formed a small 'void', the cavity of a human skull. It had been previously disturbed from above, though the base of the skull seemed to be *in situ* at 1.2m deep. These remains (sk52) included the left portion of the skull and the left side of a mandible, with no teeth present, which were temporarily lifted while excavation continued. The

base of excavation reached 1.4m deep. No natural geological horizon was reached, and the bone was replaced at the base of excavation.

Test Pit 2

The second Test Pit (2), was excavated adjacent to the western boundary wall, opposite the NW buttress of the tower. It was also designed to locate the existing pipe to the drain cover on the other side of the boundary wall (Fig. 3). Care was taken not to affect the existing modern graves to the north. [The closest marked graves, in the churchyard's northern parts, dated from 2005 in a grouping placed against the west boundary wall. Three markers, to the west and north, were of 19th-century date though these had seemingly been moved from their original locations. These were not disturbed.]

The excavated area was 1m², with hand excavation removing the turf. At 0.28m deep, the backfilled trench for the existing pipe was located, with the top of the pipe itself located at a depth of 0.77m. The finds discovered were modern, with more sherds of 'china', shards of glass, fragments of ceramic drainpipe, metal debris, limestone rubble fragments and three pieces of animal bone with butchery cuts.

Pipe trench (Figs 3 and 4; Pls 1–3)

Archaeological observation continued during hand excavation from the location of Test Pit 2, of the pipe trench for the new service to a maximum depth of 0.77m, this providing the drainage fall from east to west. The width was 0.35m. The shallowest depth of excavation was at the return into the church wall near the north-west corner of the north aisle, at a depth of 0.4m. The edging and base of the existing drainage trough was removed at this point. This seems to have been established in the later 19th century, consolidating and bonded in front of the original wall base. No natural geological deposit was reached, the excavation digging through a turf with topsoil to a dark brown sand-silt graveyard soil, as before. Within the soil was a moderate quantity of sub-rounded limestone, contained within the top 0.28m depth. No pieces were obviously shaped, but it is possible that some could have been pieces derived either from the construction of the church, though more likely during the 19th-century changes to this part of the church.

Mid-way along the pipe trench, a second stoke pipe on a NNW-SSE axis passed beyond the confines of the excavation area to the west and north (Fig. 3). This was relatively shallowly laid, between 0.24m and 0.49m, a comparable depth to the first pipe revealed.

Interior observations

Once the floorboarding was lifted inside the church, on both areas of seating in the west and central nave, the 'void' measured 0.3m deep, under this suspended floor (Pl. 4). At its base was a light, grey silty calcareous

deposit, though its length. This base was uneven and contained scattered fragments of roughly shaped, though likely waste, scraps of limestone. No other finds were present within this material.

Finds

Pottery

Two ceramic fabrics were encountered; four fragments of brown-orange glazed red-earthenware pottery, late 18th or early 19th-century date were found at various points from the top of 'churchyard' deposit (51) c.0.4m deep. Fragments of mass produced transfer-printed white 'china' were found in the overburden (layer 50) of both test pits and during the excavation of the trench. This was accompanied by two sherds of yellow-glazed stoneware (later 19th century or later date). No fragments required further analysis.

Human Bone

A single, partial skull with mandible was encountered at the base of Test Pit 1, from 1.04m deep and likely from an adult individual. A small mixed collection of disarticulated bone fragments, north of the boiler house, had elements representative of a juvenile burial, including skull fragments, teeth within part of a maxilla and two fragments from the lower arm bones (radius and ulna). A second deposit, in the curved part of the trench further east, had elements from a separate individual. Skull fragments and one large proximal tibia fragment, were disturbed remains from an adult skeleton. All bone uncovered was fragmentary, and disarticulated from their original contexts.

Conclusion

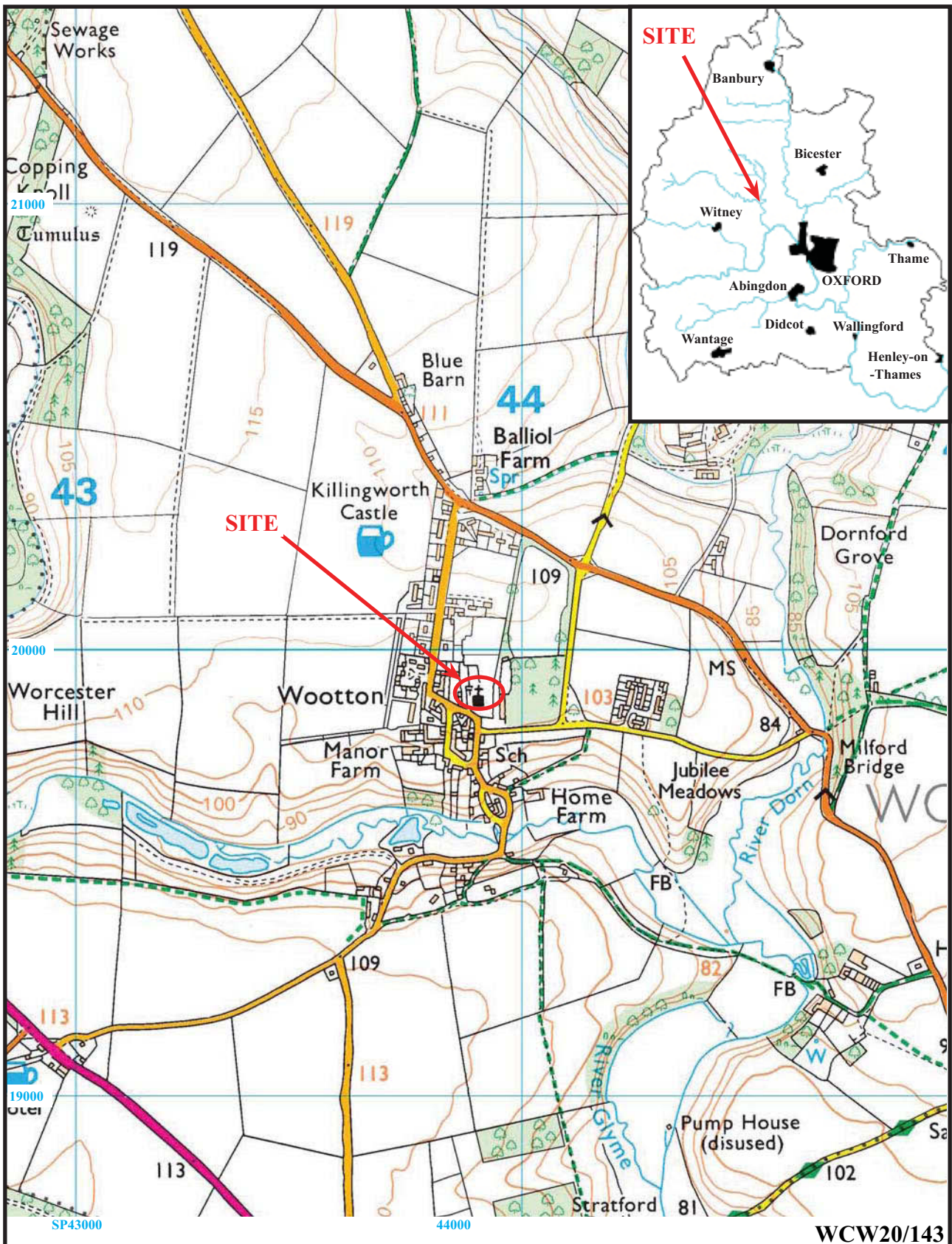
No archaeological deposits of significance were encountered. The upper deposits in the churchyard (layers 50 and 51) were truncated by the location and construction of the brick-built boiler house which was sunken and obviously truncated the ground at the west end of the aisle in the 19th century. *In situ* human remains were only presumed to exist below 1m deep, based on the remains encountered (sk52) in Test Pit 1. Only disarticulated remains were present at higher levels.

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APPENDIX 1: Feature details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
	50	Turf/overburden	19th century	Pottery, CBM
	51	Graveyard deposit	-	-
	sk52	Fragmentary skull	-	-

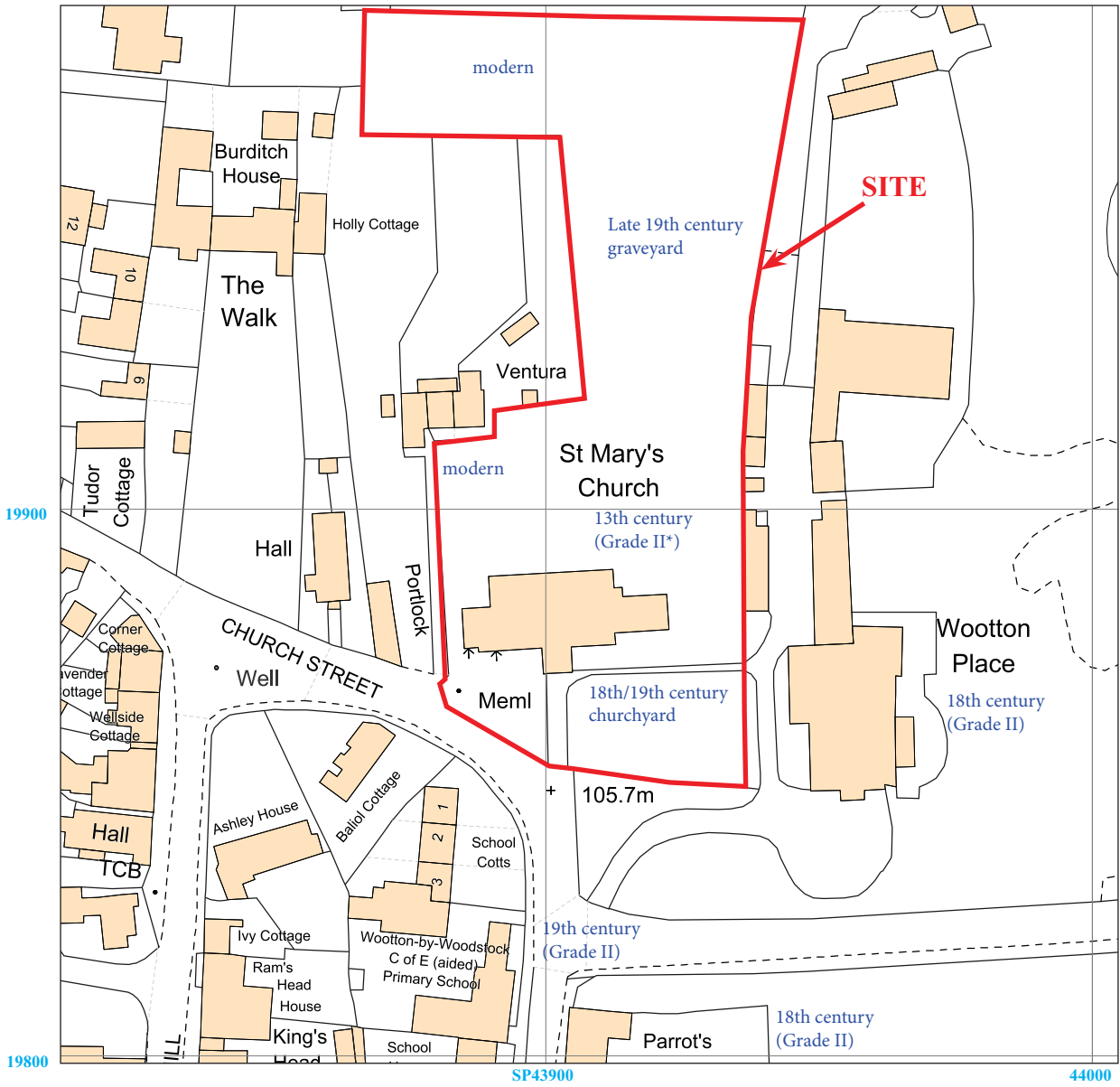


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Figure 1. Location of site within Wootton and Oxfordshire.

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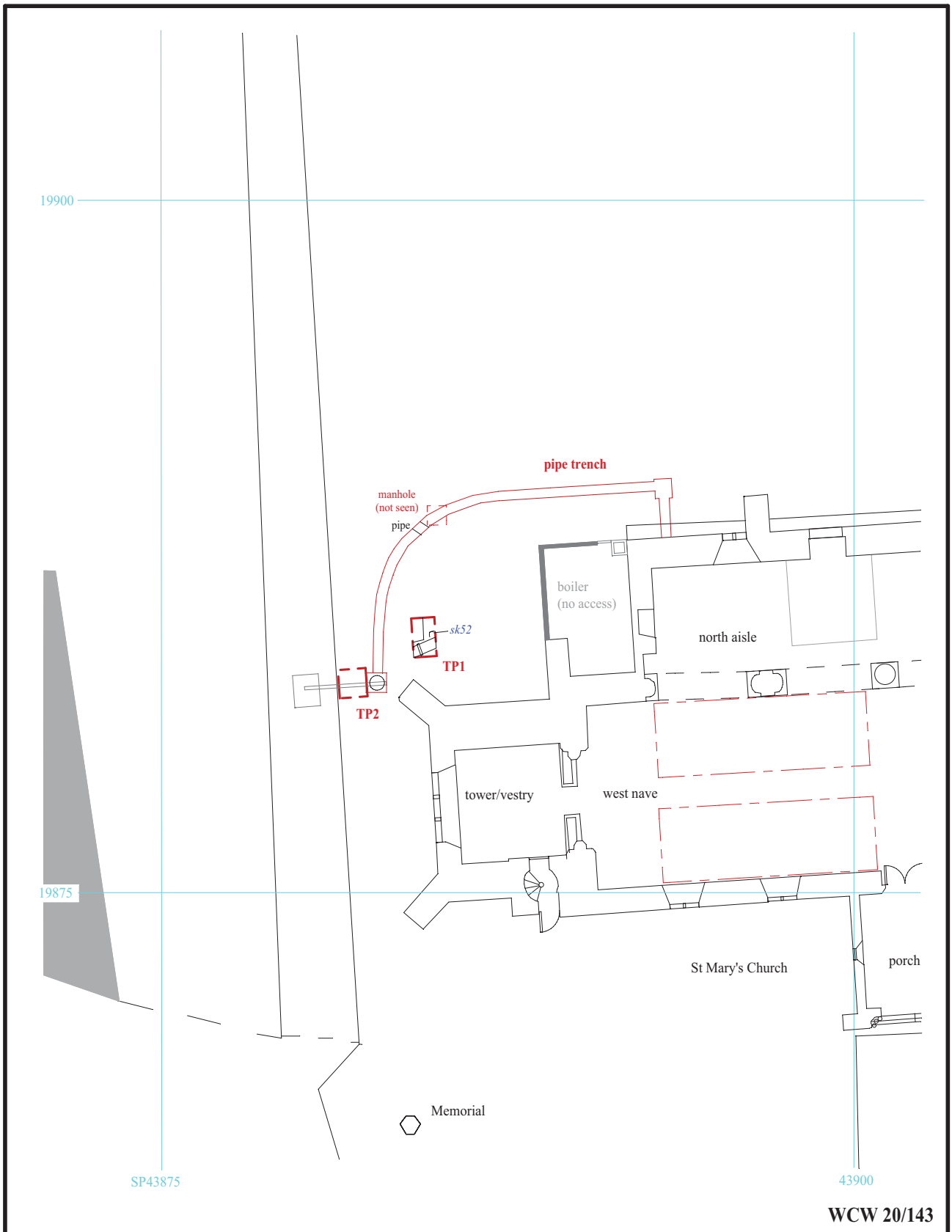


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Church Street.

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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.



Pipe trench

E

W

111m aOD

Dark brown silt with occasional stone (turf/topsoil)

Brown silty clay with moderate limestone (rubble deposit)

yellow brown clay and light yellow-brown silt

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Figure 4. Representative section.



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Plate 1. Connection of new drainage trench to north aisle wall, looking S, Scale: 0.3m.



Plate 2. Route of new drainage trench, looking W; Scale: vertical 0.3m.

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Plates 1 to 2.**

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Plate 3. Representative section of new pipe trench, looking W, Scale: vertical 0.3m.



Plate 4. Exposure of void on north side of the western nave suspended floor, Scale: 0.3m.

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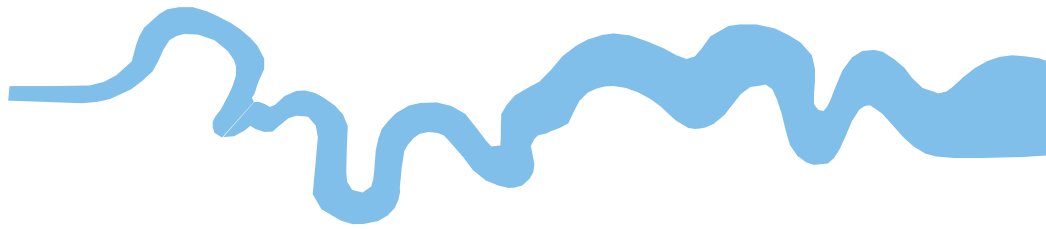
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Plates 3 to 4.**

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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, Wellingborough
and Ennis (Ireland)***