

**Aylesbury Methodist Church, Buckingham Street,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Aylesbury Methodist Church

by James McNicoll-Norbury
and Jennifer Lowe
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code ABS 08/73

April 2009

Summary

Site name: Aylesbury Methodist Church, Buckingham Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SP 8188 1404

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 28th July– 1st August 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Jennifer Lowe

Site code: ABS 08/73

Area of site: c. 60 sq m

Summary of results: No archaeological deposits were identified nor artefacts recovered. The natural geology was not encountered on the site.

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

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Report 08/73

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Aylesbury Methodist Church, Buckingham Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP20 2NQ (SU 8188 1404) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Michelle Youngman of Compton Lacey, 7 Grove Park, White Waltham, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 3LW on behalf of Aylesbury Methodist Church.

Planning consent (05/1512) had been granted by Aylesbury Vale District Council for the construction of a new single-storey extension to Aylesbury Methodist Church. As a condition of the planning permission an archaeological watching brief was required during the groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Radford, Archaeological Officer of Buckinghamshire County Council (Radford 2005). The fieldwork was undertaken by Jennifer Lowe between 28th July and 1st August 2008 and the site code is ABS 08/73.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the north side of Buckingham Street near the centre of Aylesbury (Fig. 2). The site is currently occupied by the main hall of the Methodist Church and the church itself with the immediate surrounding area occupied by church grounds. The underlying geology is described as Portland Limestone (BGS 1980), within Kimmeridge clay nearby. However, the natural geology was not observed in any of the excavated areas. The site lies at c. 88m Above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

Aylesbury, in general, has a rich and varied archaeological sequence spanning periods from the Neolithic onwards. The town's origins are thought to lie in the Saxon period which is corroborated by its mention in the

Anglo-Saxon chronicles. The archaeological potential of the site itself has been highlighted in a brief prepared by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Services (Radford 2005). In summary the site lies within the historic (Saxon and medieval) core of Aylesbury close to the projected extent of an Iron Age hillfort's ramparts. The hillfort was re-fortified in Saxon times and used as a burial ground. The site also lies close to the line of Akeman Street Roman road, with Roman deposits found in nearby areas. The church is also close to the likely site of the Saxon royal centre and minster. A very small watching brief carried out on the Masonic Hall on nearby Rippon Street failed to reveal any archaeological deposits, though conditions for observation there were very poor (Mundin 2008).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits which would have been damaged or destroyed by the new groundworks. In particular attention was to be paid to recovery of evidence relating to the Iron Age hillfort rampart that is considered likely to be present in the area.

Results

The groundwork excavations which were of archaeological interest comprised four areas of the site (Fig. 3).

Pillar bases

Three pits were observed for pillar bases (PB 1, 2 and 3) within the main hall of the building. These measured 1.10m by 1.0m and were between 0.92m and 1.0m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.14-0.32m of concrete floor overlying 0.18-0.20m light yellow sandy clay in PB1 and PB2 which in turn overlay grey/brown silty clay with much brick rubble. The stratigraphy in PB3 differed slightly with 0.30m reinforced concrete overlying 0.62m of grey/brown silty clay with occasional brick fragments. Natural geology was not reached in any of the pillar bases (Fig. 4).

The Foyer

A footing trench was excavated adjacent to the church for the new foyer extended out by 8.5m and was 0.85m wide and 1.70m deep. The brick footings of a previous building on the site could be seen close to the existing building, extending 1.80m out from the main hall. The stratigraphy of the footing trench comprised 0.10m Tarmac above 0.70m made ground overlying 0.90m of grey/brown silty clay with occasional brick and tile

fragments (Fig. 4). Natural geology was not reached. As a result of this observation, the strip foundation design was abandoned in favour of a raft foundation, which was entirely within the upper levels of made ground.

No archaeological features or finds were identified from any of the excavated areas.

Finds

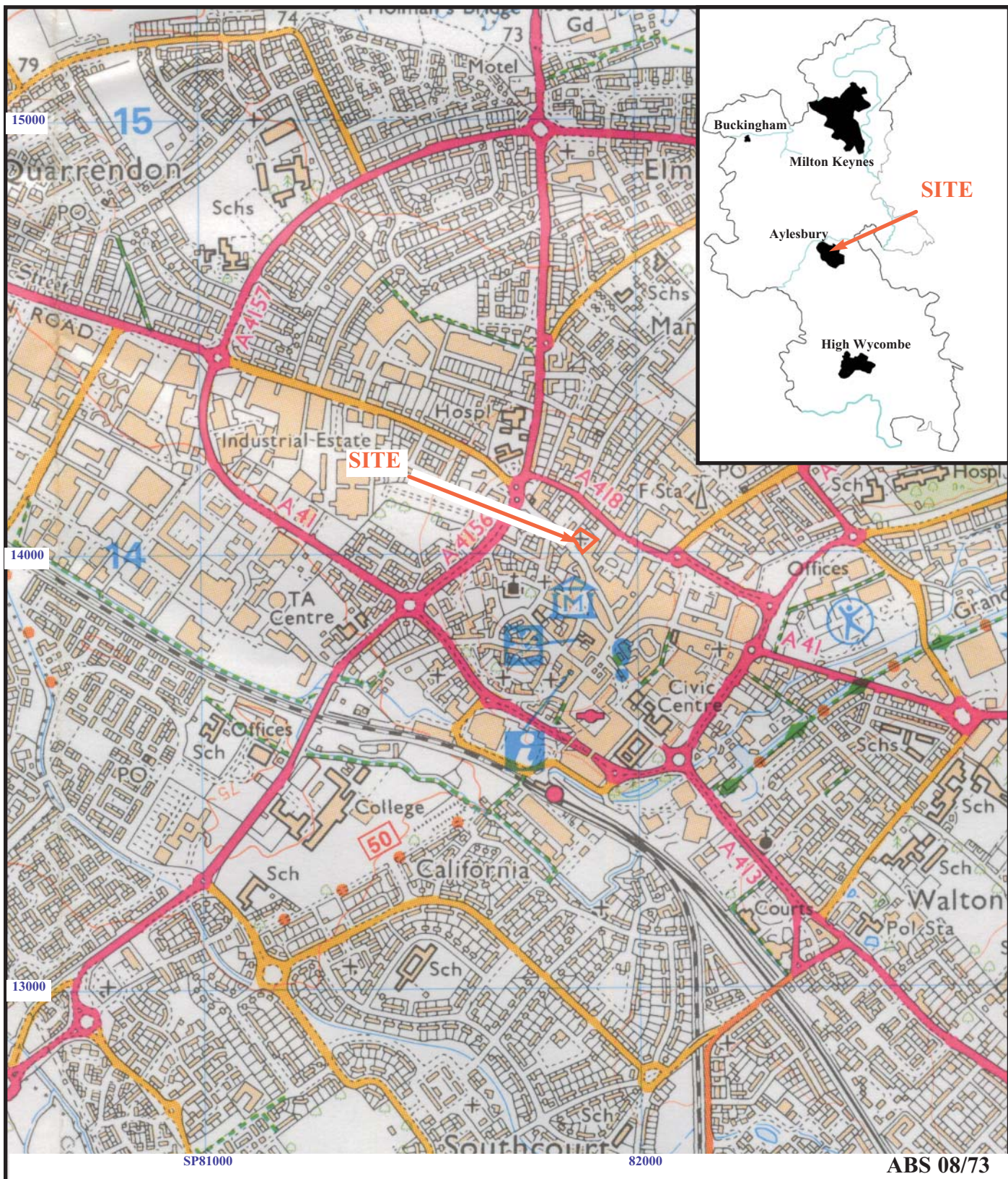
No finds of archaeological interest were recovered.

Conclusion

Despite the site lying within the historic Saxon core of Aylesbury and close to the projected extent of an Iron Age hillfort no archaeological deposits were identified in any of the four areas examined. However, the extent of the observations was necessarily limited and the natural geology was not encountered, with only a deep thickness of modern made ground revealed. The possibility of the preservation of any archaeological level below the made ground could not be ascertained.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 237, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Mundin, A, 2008, Aylesbury Masonic Hall, Rippon Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 08/60, Reading
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Radford, D, 2005, 'Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief: Project Aylesbury Methodist Church'
Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, Aylesbury



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Figure 1. Location of site within Aylesbury and Buckinghamshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site off Buckingham Street.

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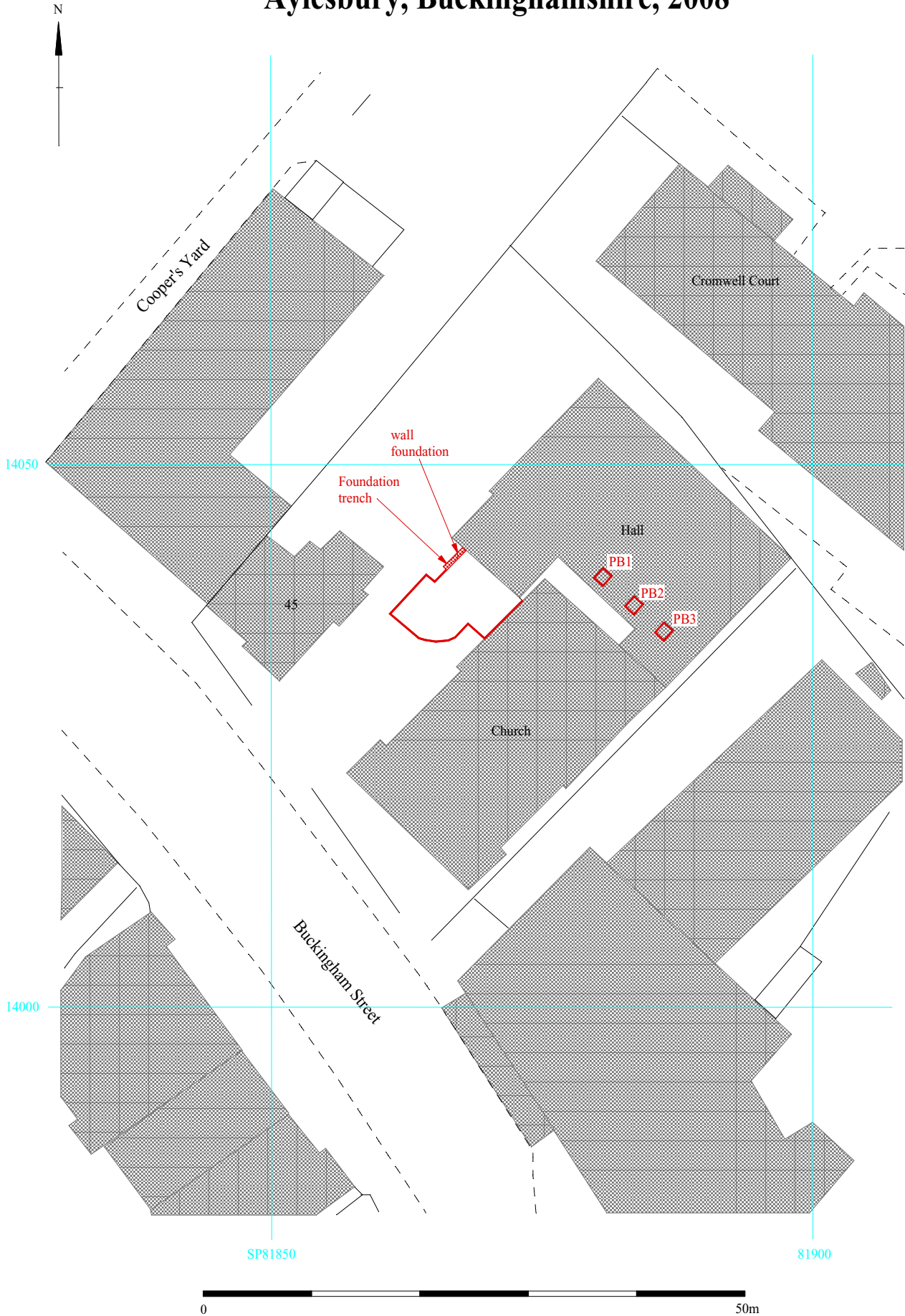


Figure 3. Location of watching brief observations.

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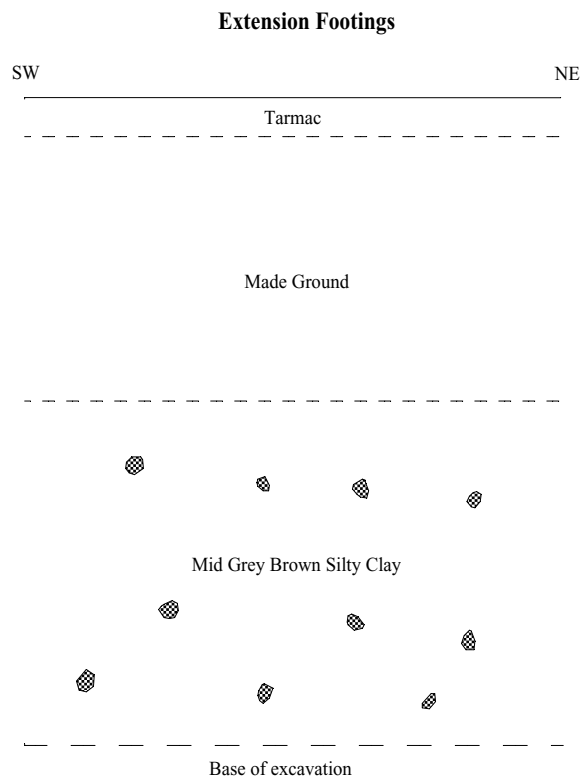
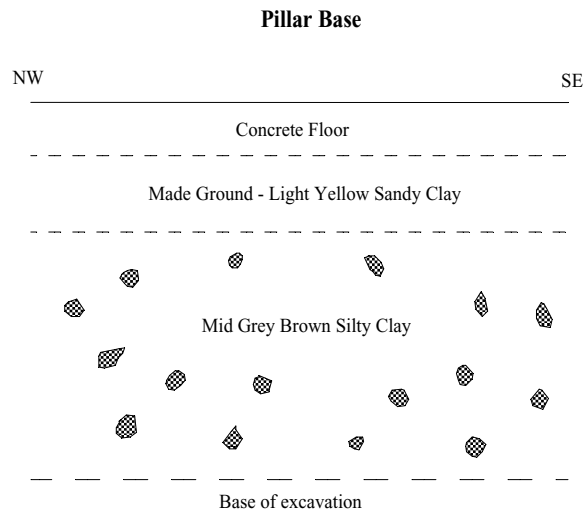


Figure 4. Representative Sections.