

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Church of St Mary Magdalene, Shabbington,
Buckinghamshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by James McNicoll-Norbury and Danielle Milbank

Site Code: CMS10/115

(SP 6666 0675)

Church of St Mary Magdalene, Shabbington, Buckinghamshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For St Mary Magdalene Parochial Church Council

by James McNicoll-Norbury and
Danielle Millbank
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code CMS10/115

December 2010

Summary

Site name: Church of St Mary Magdalene, Shabbington, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SP 6666 0675

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 28th October –25th November 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James McNicoll-Norbury and Danielle Milbank

Site code: CMS 10/115

Area of site: c. 0.3 ha

Summary of results: The project has revealed the presence of a number of limestone walls, one of which inside the church is thought to be a part of the original end of the nave, probably constructed in the 12th century. A second wall close by outside the church was aligned on the nave suggesting that it might be related and of similar date. Two other walls were recorded in the church yard were of uncertain date or function. A single, disturbed grave of uncertain date was also recorded.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 08.12.10
	Steve Preston ✓ 07.12.10

Church of St Mary Magdalene, Shabbington, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

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Report 10/115

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Mill Road, Shabbington (SP 6666 0675) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Alan Frost, of Alan J Frost Architects, Windmill House, Wingrave, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP22 4PD on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, Church of St Mary Magdalene, Shabbington.

A faculty has been gained from the Archdeaconry of Buckinghamshire to install a new kitchen and lavatory at the Church of St Mary Magdalene. The kitchen and toilet will also require the digging of a cess pit and sewer pipe trench in the courtyard. An archaeological watching brief has been requested to take place during the groundworks.

This is in accordance with the faculty gained and the Diocese's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification provided by the Oxford Diocesan Adviser on Archaeology, and based on a brief issued by him (Munby 2009). The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Millbank and James McNicoll-Norbury between 28th October and 25th November 2010 and the site code is CMS 10/115.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located off Mill Road on the southern edge of the village of Shabbington which lies to the north-west of Thame (Fig. 1). The site is currently occupied by the church and churchyard (Fig. 2). The site lies at around 65m above Ordnance Datum and the underlying geology is described as lying on the boundary of Kimmeridge Clay formations and River Terrace Deposits (BGS 1993). The River Thame lies a few hundred metres to the east.

Archaeological background

The parish church is usually considered to lie at the centre of the historic core of a settlement and in this case, upstanding earthworks south of the church (Fig. 2) suggest the medieval village originally extended in that

direction, perhaps as far as the river crossing, although today the church is at the southern limit of the settlement. Shabbington is first recorded in Domesday Book (Williams and Martin 2002) as *Sobintone* although it is likely to be of late Saxon origin. Nineteen taxpayers and six slaves are registered, there was a mill, meadow and fishery and extensive woodland for pigs suggesting a prosperous medium-sized manor. The manor was controlled for some time by the Knights of the Hospital of St John at Jerusalem. Overall little is recorded archaeologically for the village but an excavation on Ickford Road, on the western margins of the current built zone, revealed medieval deposits of the 11th to 13th centuries (Coles and Preston 2008) and Roman pottery finds are occasionally reported from the village. The church is a Grade II* Listed building. According to the listing, the earliest elements of the church date from c. 1100 with extensive remodelling in the 14th century. The west tower and nave roof are of late 15th-century date with the north porch a 19th-century addition. Restoration work was carried out during the late 19th century.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the digging of the cess pit and sewer trench, the slight lowering of the ground outside of the tower, insertion of the kitchen and toilet within the tower and insertion of services through the tower wall, to determine the extent to which human remains survive within the area of the sewer and cess pit works and to observe the presence of graves and vaults. Any human remains were to be retained on site for re-burial.

Results

The areas of intrusive groundworks observed are shown in Figure 3.

Tower interior

The existing floor of the West Tower was removed and the ground reduced by 0.40m, the stratigraphy comprising 0.12m stone flooring slabs above 0.24m light brown grey sand with occasional limestone, brick and tile (52) overlying dark grey silty clay with occasional limestone and charcoal (54). A stone-built wall (53) was recorded across the eastern end of the tower (Plate 1). This wall was 0.50m wide and 0.14m of the wall in height was exposed in the reduced area. The wall was made of large irregular blocks of limestone with rough faces, up to 0.50m across; no visible bond was observed between the blocks. The wall is likely to be the remains of the original end of the nave prior to the tower being built in the 15th century which would suggest a date of the 12th century for the construction of the wall.

Tower exterior

A trench 1.00m wide and up to 0.50m deep was dug by a mini-digger fitted with a toothless bucket around the exterior of the West Tower, revealing 0.30m topsoil and up to 0.20m subsoil. No archaeological features or finds were found in this area.

Cess pit

A cess pit (Fig. 4) was dug north of the West Tower which covered a 2.7m x 2.7m area and was 3.5m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.28m topsoil (50), above 0.21m dark brown/grey silty clays (51), over 0.91m grey/brown clays (60) containing large amounts of disarticulated human bone and a grave [1]. This overlay 0.65m of dark grey clays (61) which contained a wall (56) which in turn overlay natural orange brown sandy clays (Fig. 5).

The remains of a truncated rectangular shaped grave [1] was recorded in layer 60 at 1.18m below the surface which was aligned west-east and was 1.42m long by 0.50m wide containing a mid greyish brown silty clay and the remains of a skeleton (55). Due to the truncation at the western end of the grave the upper part of the body including the head and upper right arm, spine and rib cage was missing (Plate 2). The articulated remains of the left arm were found intact with the exception of hand bones and the pelvis and upper part of both legs were also found intact. The lower part of the legs however could not be found. Due to the need to dig further the bones were removed and returned to the church for reburial. No grave goods were found in the grave nor coffin fittings although coffin nails were found elsewhere in layer 60 which may have come from this grave.

At 2.05m below the surface in layer 61 parts of a limestone built wall (56) that was aligned north-south were recorded which was also aligned with the west end of the Nave. The wall consisted of four courses of irregular shaped limestone blocks measuring between 0.10-0.30m long by up to 0.20m wide with no bonding agent present (Plate 3). The wall was only seen in fragments in the centre of the cess pit. No associated finds were recovered from the wall.

Service trench

A service trench was dug through the churchyard measuring 74m long and 0.5m wide (Fig. 3). It was 0.35m deep (near the church) and up to 0.80m closer to Mill Road (Plate 4). The stratigraphy was similar of that seen in the cess pit and further disarticulated bones were recovered from the deeper parts of the service trench at the northern end of the trench. At the northern most end of the trench the tops of two sections of limestone built wall

(58 and 59) were observed, the walls were 0.50m wide and two courses amounting to 0.25m were exposed in the trench. The walls were made of irregular limestone blocks similar to those of wall 56 with no mortar present either, it is possible that they form part of the same structure due to their alignment, but unlikely to be directly associated with wall 56 to the south-west.

Finds

No finds were recovered from the site and the human bone which was identified on site was left with the church for re-interment.

Conclusion

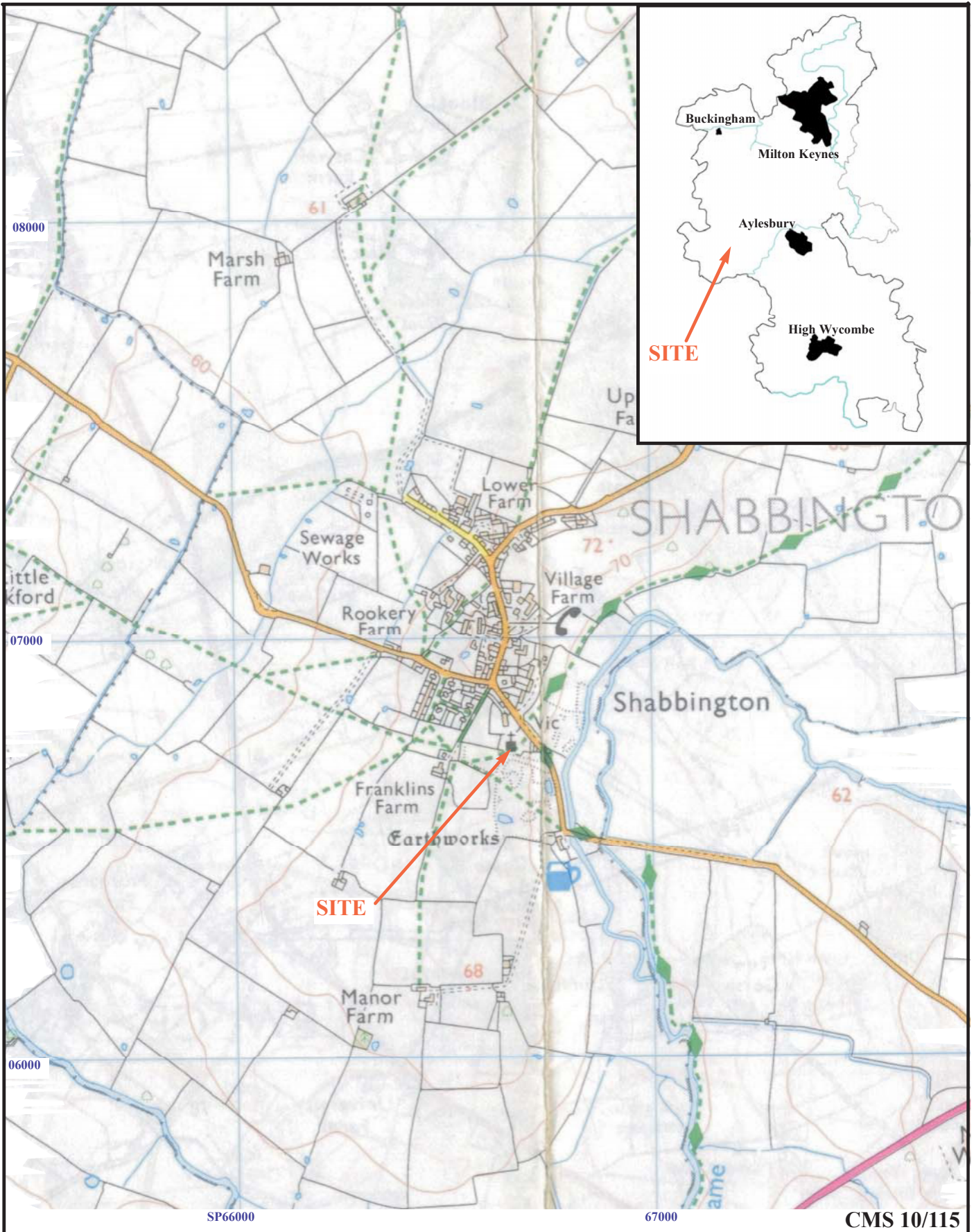
The project has revealed the presence of several deposits of certain and probable interest. These comprise a number of limestone walls, one of which was inside the church and which is thought to be the base of the original end of the nave. As the nave was extended to form the west tower in the 15th century, it seems likely that the foundation exposed is that of the 12th century nave wall. A second wall was recorded at some depth in the cesspit trench to the north. It was not dated, though its form, depth, position below a later burial and its alignment on the west wall of the nave suggest that it might be of medieval date. Two other partly exposed walls of similar construction are of uncertain date or function. A single grave which had been previously disturbed was also found in the area of cess pit dig. No additional archaeological features were identified.

References

- BGS, 1993, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 237, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Coles, S and Preston, S, 2008, 'Medieval features at The Bungalow, Ickford Road, Shabbington', *Rec Buckinghamshire* **48**, 141–54
- Munby, J 2009, 'Church of St Mary Magdalene, Shabbington Archaeological Recording Specification', Oxford
- PPS5, 2010, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, The Stationery Office, Norwich
- Williams, A and Martin, G H 2002, *Domesday Book, A complete Translation*, London

APPENDIX 1: Feature details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill(s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating Evidence</i>
	53	Wall	c. 12th century	Pre- 15th century tower; Documentary
1	54, 55	Grave		None
	56	Wall	Medieval?	Aligned on nave wall
	58	Wall		None
	59	Wall		None

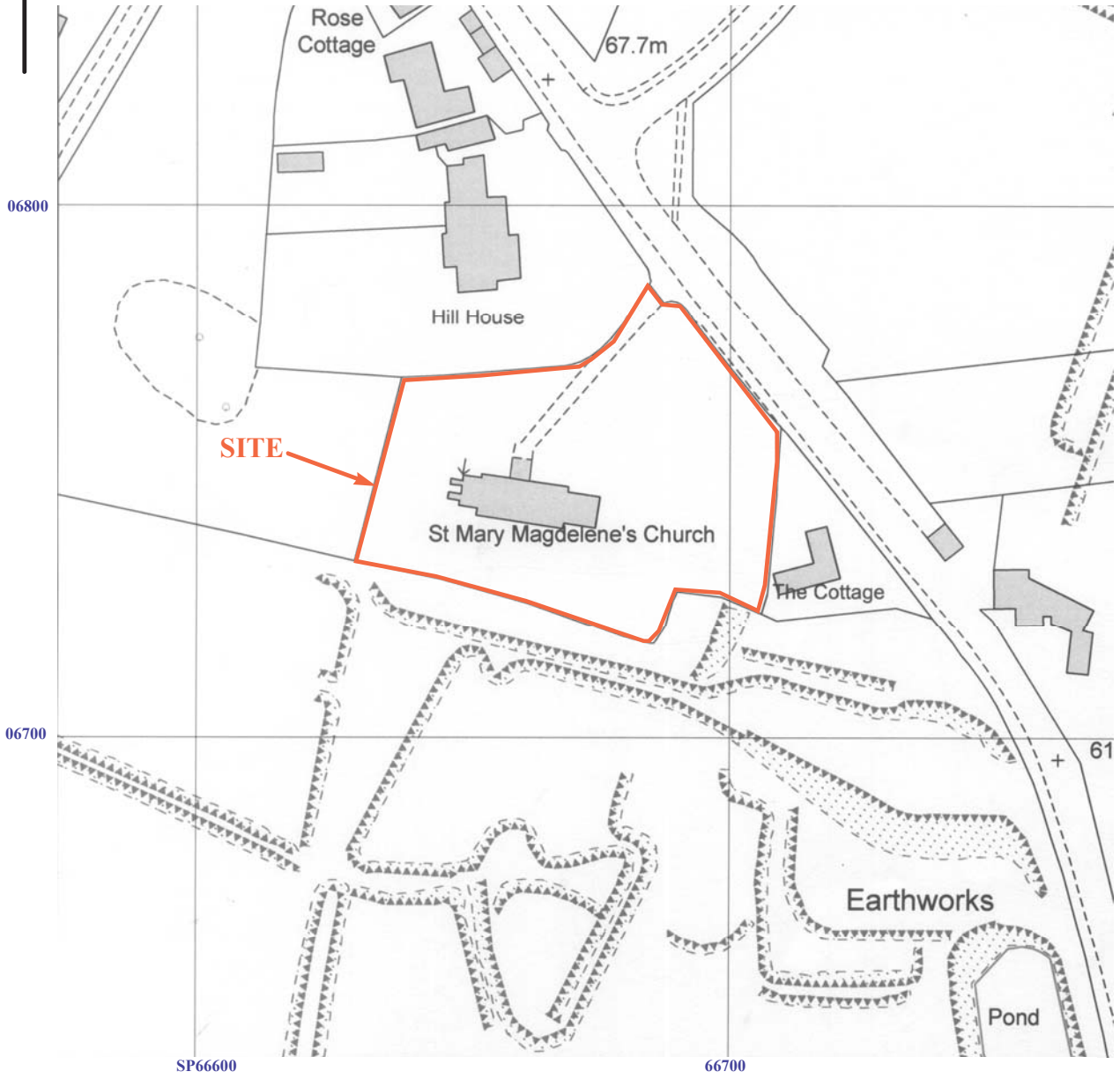


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Figure 1. Location of site within Shabbington and Buckinghamshire.

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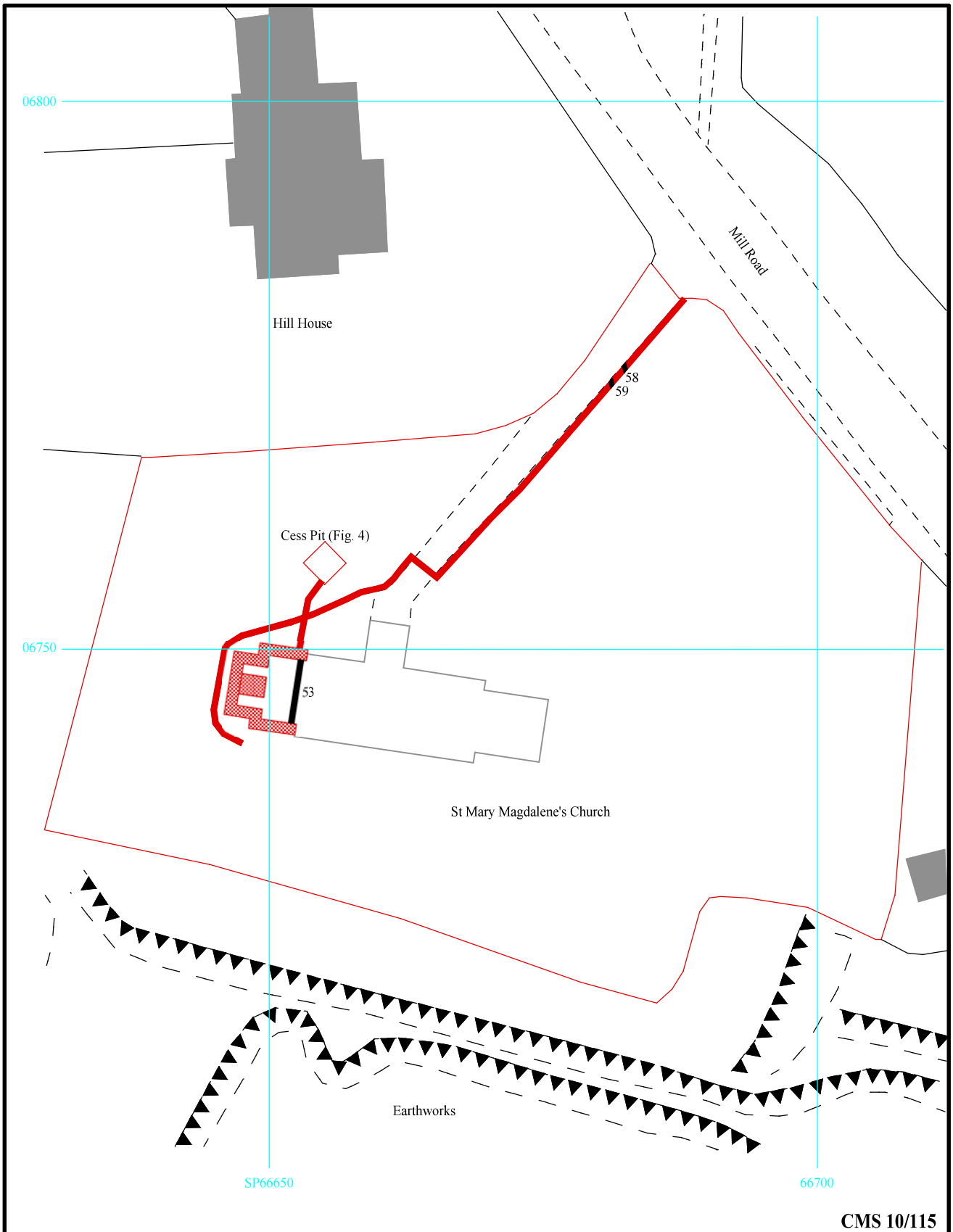
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Mill Road.

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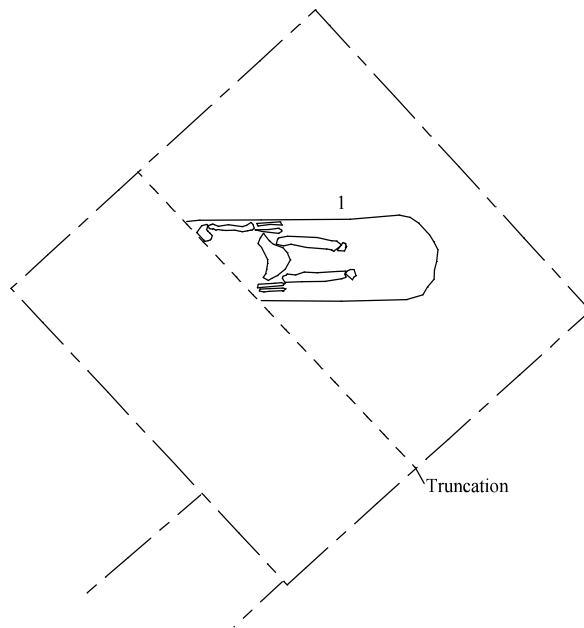
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Figure 3. Areas monitored

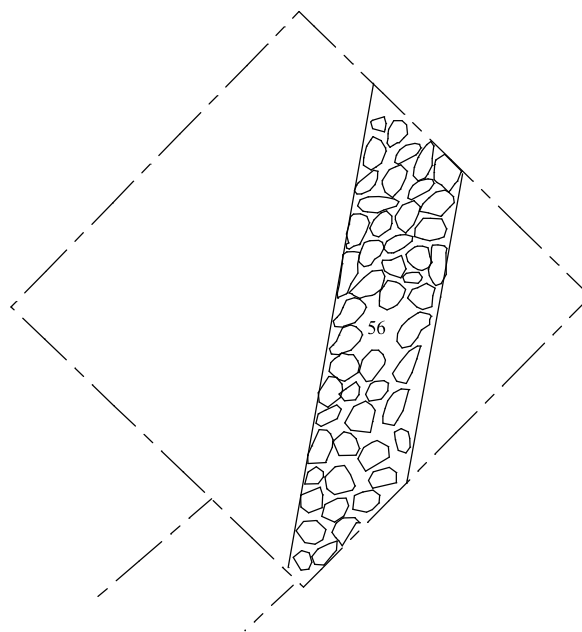


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Cess Pit at 1.18m



Cess Pit at 2.05m



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Figure 4. Plans of new cess pit at different levels.

SW _____ NE 65.7m AOD

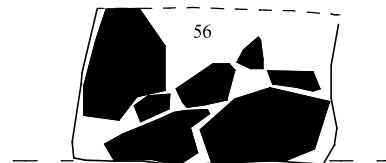
Topsoil (50)

Dark Brown Grey Silty Clays (51)

Grey Brown Clays (60)

← Fig. 4 @ 1.18m

Grey Clays (61)



← Fig. 4 @ 2.05m

Orange Brown Sandy Clay (natural geology)

Base of cess pit

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Figure 5. Representative section of cess pit.





Plate 1. Interior of West Tower, looking north, scales: 1.0m, 0.5m and 0.1m

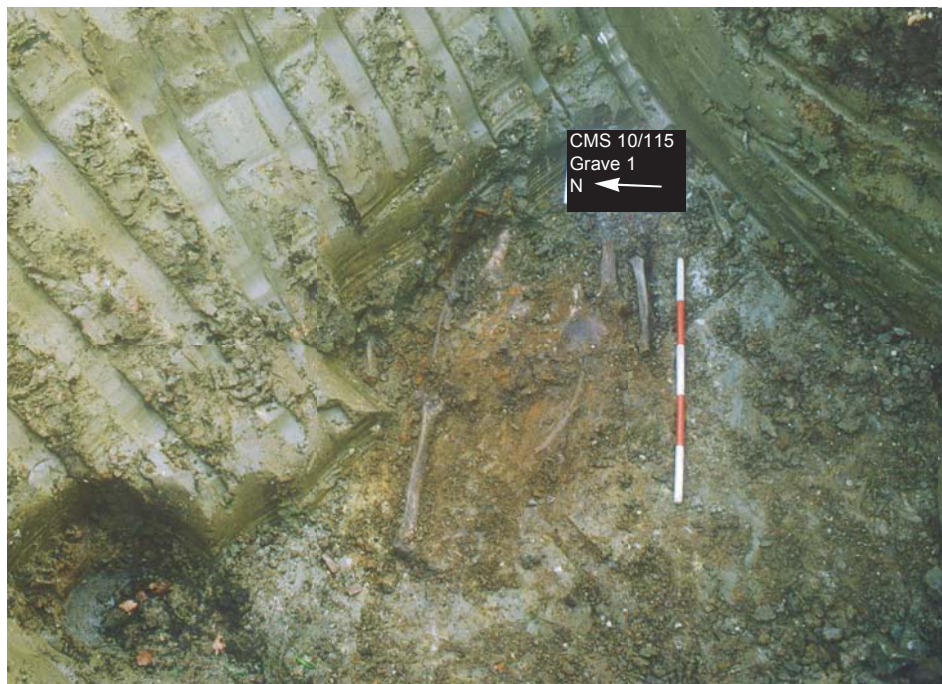


Plate 2. Grave 1 in cess pit, looking east, scale: 0.5m

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Plates 1 and 2.

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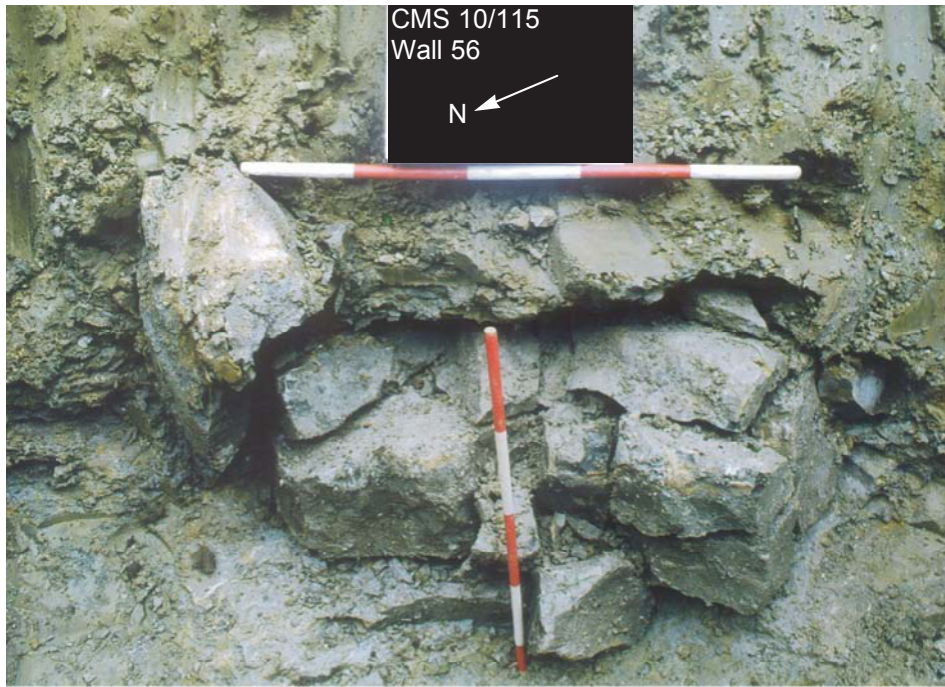


Plate 3. Wall 56, looking south east, Scales: both 0.5m



Plate 4. Service Trench, looking north, Scales: 1.0m and 1.0m

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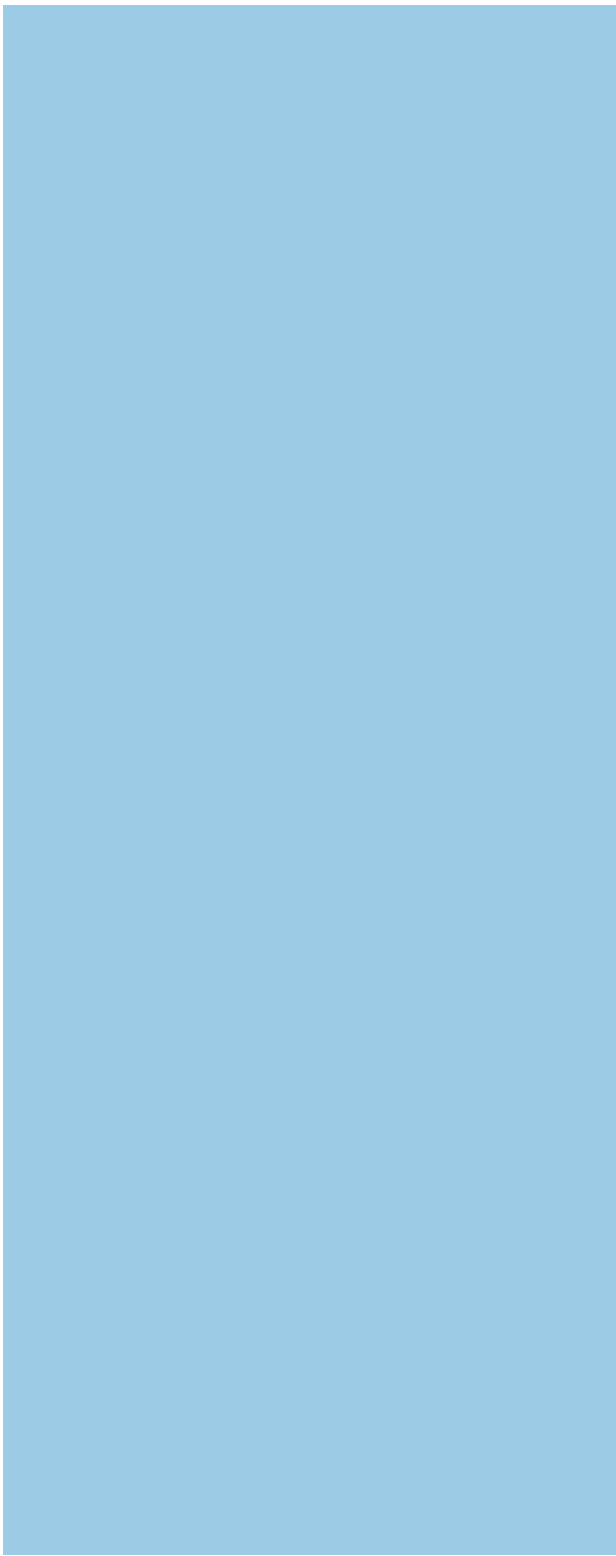
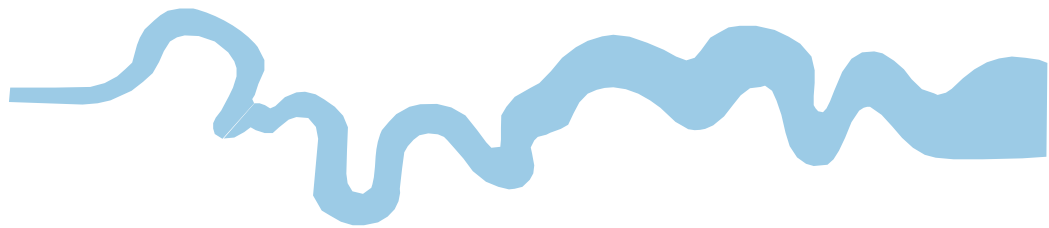
Plates 3 and 4.

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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
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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