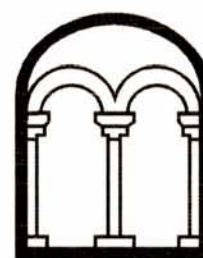


**THE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS
HINXWORTH
HERTFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
RECORDING AND REPORTING**

Albion
archaeology



**THE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS
HINXWORTH
HERTFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
AND INVESTIGATION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Levitt Partnership on behalf of the Parochial Church Council to oversee groundworks associated with the re-flooring of three areas within the Church of St Nicholas, Hinxworth, Hertfordshire, and to investigate and record any archaeological remains that were uncovered.

The attendance of an archaeologist had been requested by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA 2011) as a precaution against the discovery of archaeological remains during the building works.

2. BACKGROUND

The Church of St Nicholas lies in the village of Hinxworth, on Ashwell Road, and is centred on grid reference TL 23736 40347 (Figure 1).

The Grade I listed building consists of a chancel, aisle-less nave, west tower and porch. The description in the Victoria County History (1912) is as follows:

The church of ST. NICHOLAS consists of chancel 20 ft. by 16 ft., nave 42 ft. 6in. by 20 ft., west tower 10ft. 6 in. square, and south porch 12ft. by 10ft., all dimensions taken internally. The walls are of flint with stone dressings and low-pitched roofs are covered with lead.

The general walling of nave and west tower, the north and south doorways and the windows adjoining them on the west, belong to the middle of the 14th century; the west window of the tower and the north, south and west belfry openings were inserted later in the century; the east belfry opening may be original. About 1440 the chancel arch was pulled down and built about 2 ft. further east, and the two large nave windows with their niches and the low side window were inserted, and the upper passage to the rood-loft roughly formed eastward towards the new chancel arch. The clearstory was raised about the close of the 15th century and the south porch was erected, and the chancel arch recut to fit it under the new low-pitched roof, the former roof having been high pitched, as shown by the marks on the east face of the tower. The chancel was rebuilt of brick about the beginning of the 18th century. In 1887 the church was restored, a new roof put over the nave, and stone windows inserted in the chancel. The nave and tower walls are embattled.

3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The building works requiring monitoring comprised two excavations (Trenches 1 and 2) at the west end of the chancel and one (Trench 3) at the west end of the nave (Figures 1 and 2). The works comprised the removal of the existing floors and the reduction of the ground level by approximately 0.3m in the chancel and 0.2m in the nave.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring took place on 14th June 2011. The methods employed during the project complied with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (1999), English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991), and Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (2001).

All of the excavation work was carried out by hand by the building contractor under archaeological supervision. Exposed features and deposits of archaeological interest were cleaned and investigated where necessary by the supervising archaeologist.



Observations and measurements were recorded on *pro forma* recording sheets and a digital photographic record was made of the works.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Trenches 1 and 2

The two areas of excavation (Trenches 1 and 2) were situated at the west end of the chancel (Figure 2 and 3). They were square in plan, *c.* 2m by 2m and up to 0.3m deep. The works initially involved the removal of timber flooring and metal frames which held the timber. A further 0.1m of soil was removed below the metal frames in order to reach the required level, 0.3m below floor level.

The arched roofs of two brick-built, probable burial vaults (7, 5) were uncovered in Trenches 1 and 2 respectively, at a depth of 0.21m (Figures 4 and 5). Backfill deposits (1, 4) surrounding the vaults comprised light grey chalky silt and contained occasional pieces of building material including several bricks. The bricks were of probable 18th-century date, hand-made and typically measured 220mm x 110mm x 60mm with a reddish orange matrix and a dark red or black exterior. They were similar to those making up the vaults and the chancel walls (Figure 7). The vaults were left intact and unbreached by the groundworks and subsequent backfilling.

Trench 2 also revealed a stone footing (10) for the southern wall of the chancel which was slightly wider than the wall itself (Figure 5). The footing comprised a course of unmortared, squared stones which were generally 150mm deep, at least 110mm wide and up to 420mm long.

A small amount of disarticulated human bone was found within backfill (1) in Trench 1. A larger amount of disarticulated bone and two corroded iron, probable coffin handles were found in Trench 2. Collectively, the bones from Trench 2 possibly represent the disturbed remains of a single individual.

5.2 Trench 3

Trench 3 was L-shaped and situated in the south-west corner of the nave (Figure 6). It measured 3.3m by 2.6m and was mostly up to 0.2m deep. The excavation of the trench involved the breaking-out and removal of 0.15m of concrete. A further 0.05m of soil was then removed to reach the desired level, 0.18–0.2m below floor level. A 0.38m deep pit was excavated at the east end of the excavation in order to accommodate a drain from the repositioned font.

Two deposits (2, 3) were recorded under the concrete. Deposit 2 comprised a mixture of light yellow grey sand and clay. Deposit 3 comprised dark grey brown sandy silt and was mainly derived from topsoil. It contained a chocolate bar wrapper made of foil. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the concrete floor was installed in the 1950s. It seems likely, therefore, that the backfilled deposits directly below the floor were laid down around the same time.



6. CONCLUSIONS

The excavation works within the church revealed some interesting aspects of its later history. In particular, it revealed that when the chancel was rebuilt in the early 18th century, the reconstruction may also have included the installation of at least two brick-built vaults. This building activity may have disturbed an earlier confined burial.

The rebuilt brick chancel also appears to have reused the stone footings of an earlier stone chancel, or at least to have incorporated demolished stonework in its foundations.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

DAA 2011. *Brief for Archaeological Investigation, Recording and Reporting at the Church of St Nicholas, Hinxworth,*

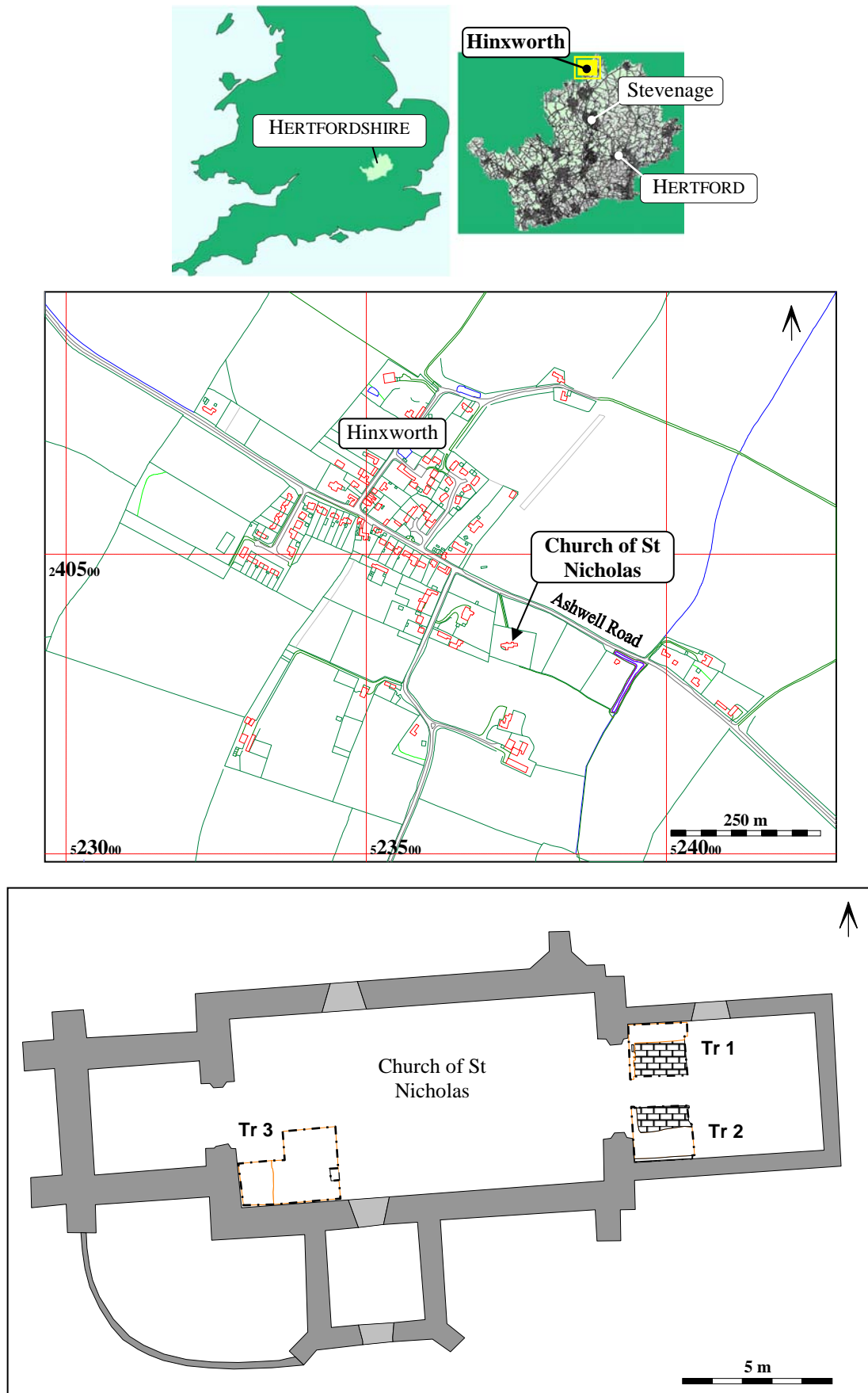


Figure 1: Site location plan

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Figure 2: Groundworks plan



Figure 3: View north-west of Trenches 1 and 2.



Figure 4: View north of Trench 1 showing brick vault



Figure 5: View east of Trench 2 showing brick vault and stone footing



Figure 6: View south-west of Trench 3



Figure 7: View of chancel

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