

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION, RECORDING AND REPORTING AT THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, LITTLE STAUGHTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

Albion Archaeology Project No: LSC1203

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Introduction

In August 2006, a trench was excavated adjacent to part of the south aisle and the tower to construct a gravel ventilating drain (French drain) as part of maintenance work at All Saints' Church, Little Staughton, Bedfordshire (NGR: TL 10735 62995) (Figure 1). The work was carried out to remedy damp occurring in the south-west corner of the nave, adjacent to the tower and south aisle.

A Brief was issued by Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA) indicating the nature of the required archaeological response (DAA 2005).

Albion Archaeology was appointed by Laurane Bubbins of the Victor Farrar Partnership acting on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, to undertake the archaeological monitoring of the ground disturbance during the ground works.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Mark Phillips (Project Officer) under the management of Hester Cooper-Read (Business Manager). This report has been prepared by Mark Phillips with figures prepared by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician).

Fieldwork

Excavation of the trench was carried out by the site contractors, K G Wright. The site was attended by an archaeologist on two occasions: Thursday 10th August and Tuesday 15th August. During the first visit, the trench had been opened along the west end of the aisle and the south side of the tower and was being extended in front of the west door of the tower. At the time of the last visit, the trench had been fully excavated.

Historical Background

The church consists of a chancel, nave with south aisle, south porch and west tower. The list of incumbents begins in 1245. In its earliest form, the building would probably have comprised simply a nave and chancel. The north door of the nave dates from the 13th century. It is likely that the underlying structure of the nave and possibly the chancel date from this period. In the 14th century, the arcade was inserted in the south side of the nave and the south aisle and porch constructed. The building was extensively remodelled in the 15th century. During this period the tower was added, the nave heightened with a clerestory stage and the chancel rebuilt. A new spire was

constructed in 1910, following the destruction of the original by lightning in 1900. The final major addition to the building was carried out in 1924-25 when an organ chamber was built into the north wall of the chancel.

Further information and references to original documentary sources can be found in *Bedfordshire Churches in the Nineteenth Century: Part III* edited by Chris Pickford, Pevsner and the Victoria County History of Bedfordshire.

Previous Archaeological Works

Previous archaeological recording work was undertaken at the church in 1996 (Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service 1996). This comprised two stages of recording work that were undertaken during the underpinning of the organ chamber and subsequently during the installation of drainage along the north side of the church.

Location and Extent of Groundworks

A trench was excavated adjacent to the west end of the south aisle and the south side of the tower (Figure 2). In this section of the trench, loose stonework in the foundations was re-pointed before a perforated pipe was laid prior to filling with gravel. The continuation of the trench was excavated to the west of the tower where it stopped approximately 4.5m from the north boundary of the churchyard. This section of the finished trench contained a perforated pipe laid in gravel and sealed with topsoil and turf.

The finished trench was 22.70m long, 0.60m wide and 0.55–0.60m deep. It was hand-dug throughout its length.

Observations

Foundations of the Tower, Nave and South Aisle

The Tower

The tower is constructed of limestone throughout. It has four stages with diagonal buttresses on each corner carried up to the top of the third stage. The plinth at the base of the tower consists of a narrow course plain chamfer beneath a single course of large, undecorated ashlar blocks topped by a moulded chamfer. The base of the course forming the plain chamfer lay just above ground level.

The foundations of the south side of the tower were exposed within the trench. Below the plain chamfered course, three components of the wall were revealed. Immediately below the chamfered course, the wall consisted of small- to medium-sized, roughly coursed limestone with brown pebbles utilised in one area. Below that was a single course of irregular, roughly dressed limestone blocks. These blocks measured up to 0.5m in length and 0.25m in height. The next course down consisted of very large blocks of limestone forming a foundation plinth. The blocks were up to 0.8m long and projected 0.2m beyond the face of the wall at its base. The outer edge of the south-west corner buttress of the tower was supported by a single block 1m long and 0.6m wide.

South-west corner of the Nave

The south-west corner of the nave is visible, sandwiched between the tower and the west side of the south aisle. It consists of brown pebbles with limestone quoining forming the corner. This narrow section of wall appears to be butted up against the south side of the tower in the masonry that survives above ground level. Within the trench, the foundations consisted of a mixture of brown pebbles and limestone that appeared to be either roughly constructed or to have been disturbed.

West Wall of the South Aisle

This wall is constructed mostly of brown pebbles with quoining in limestone on its south-west corner. The material in the face of the wall includes limestone, some of which appears to have been reused, comprising carefully faced pieces and a large fragment, which has a point arch shape carved into it. A course of limestone masonry exposed in the trench formed a plain chamfer at the top of the foundation plinth. The top of this chamfered course was situated *c.*0.15m below ground level but would presumably have been at, or above, ground level when first constructed. The foundations consisted of brown pebbles. No mortar was visible, the interstices being filled with soil; however, it is likely that the mortar has decayed.

The west end wall of the south aisle is clearly butted up against the masonry forming the south-west corner of the nave. The two join in a straight, masonry joint that extends down to the foundations.

Soil Layers

The soil from the base of the trench to 0.2m below the ground surface consisted of a mid yellowish brown silty clay with moderate stone content comprising small- and medium-sized flint and chalk with occasional large flint nodules. A stone-line in the upper part of this deposit, noted in the western part of the trench, may mark the base of a former topsoil layer.

Adjacent to the south wall of the tower, the trench was cut through a thin layer of tarmac over gravel. The tarmac surface was sealed beneath a modern turf and topsoil layer, approximately 0.1m deep that contained localised concentrations of limestone rubble.

A layer consisting of small fragments of limestone rubble mixed with soil was found close to where the trench passed the north-west corner of the tower. This layer was located 0.15–0.20m below ground level. It was sealed by a relatively stone-free layer of turf and topsoil.

Human Remains and Artefacts

Only a small amount of disarticulated bone was recovered during the excavation of the trench. The majority of the bone was found in the section of the trench next to the aisle and tower. None was observed in the trench where it crossed the west end of the church.

A single sherd of pottery was recovered from general soil layers in the western part of the trench. Examination suggested that this was late medieval in date, *c.*14th–15th century.

Conclusions

Architectural details suggest the following sequence for the construction history of the church. The nave and chancel are likely to date from the 13th century or earlier. The south arcade, south aisle and south porch were added in the 14th century. Extensive works during the 15th century included the addition of the tower, the addition of a clerestory to the nave and the rebuilding of the chancel.

Observation of the masonry at the junction between the tower and the south-west corner of the nave gives the impression that the masonry of the aisle is butted up against the tower, the opposite of the suggested construction history. The results of the observation within the trench were ambiguous on this point: the masonry forming the foundation of the aisle at this point appeared disturbed.

It seems most likely that, following the demolition of the western end of the nave, the tower was carefully inserted. The masonry that remains at the southwest corner of the nave joins the tower in a straight joint, which gives the impression that the nave has been butted up against the tower.

The provision of diagonal buttresses on each corner of the tower appears slightly odd in view of the fact that the two on the western side of the tower are largely incorporated into the masonry of the nave. A more usual design would be to use straight buttresses projecting perpendicularly from the side of the tower at the join or in some cases, to use diagonal buttresses wide enough to accommodate the western corners of the nave.

Bibliography

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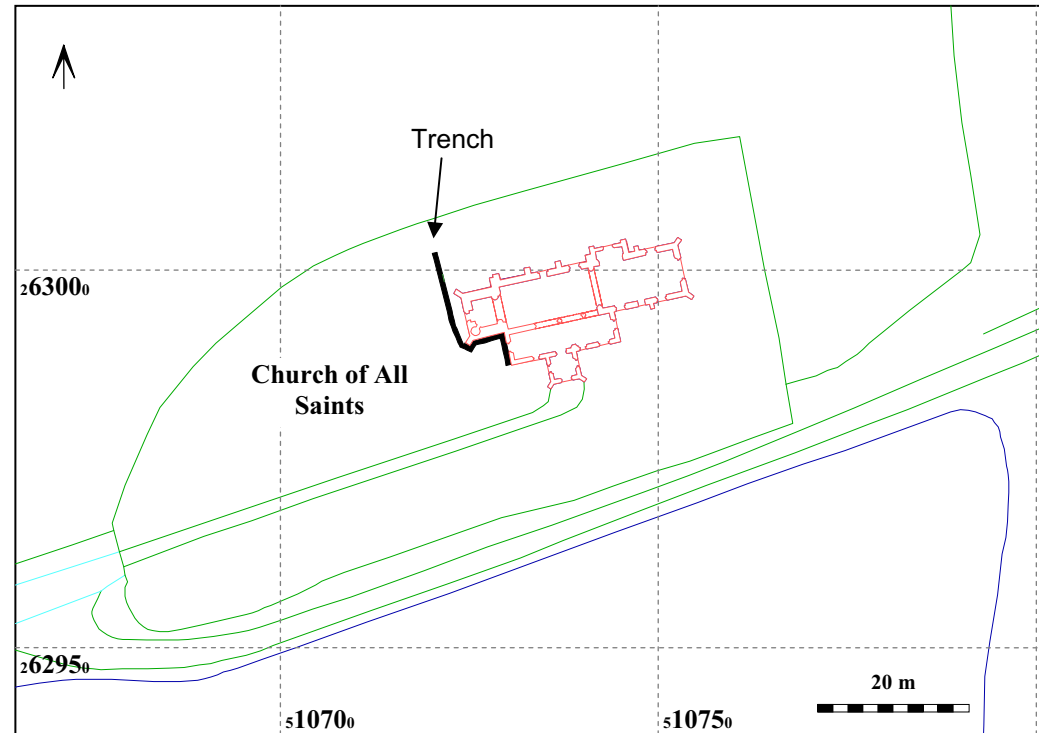
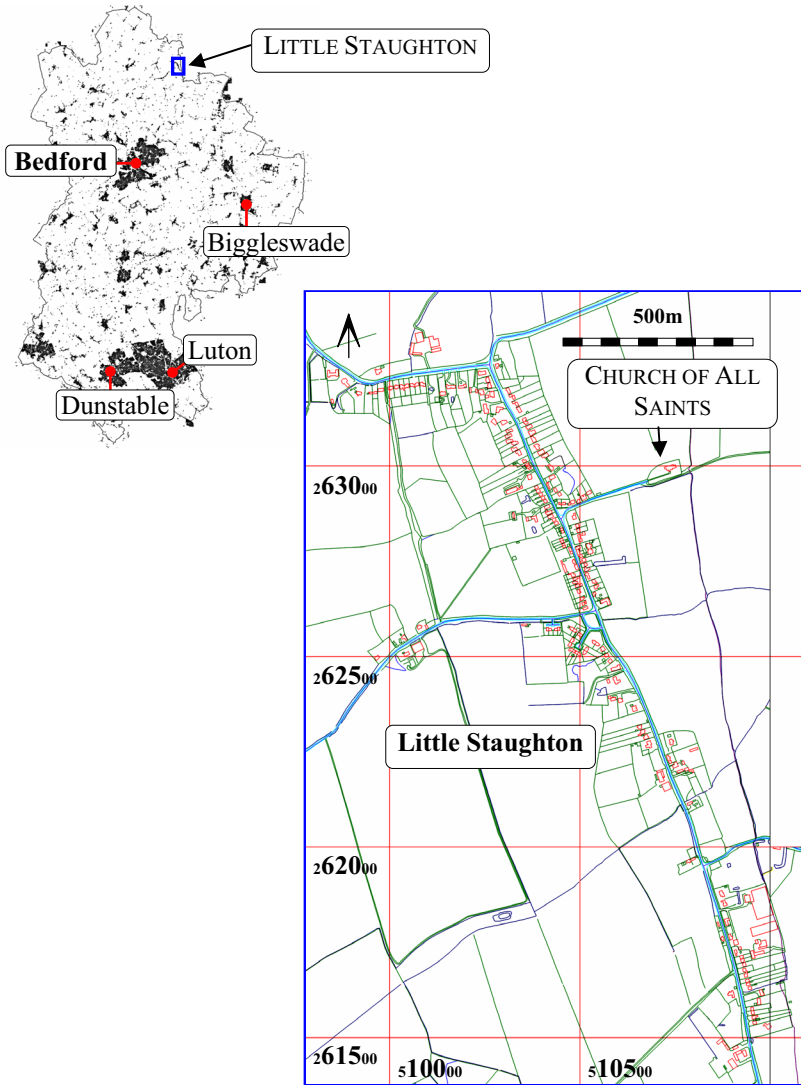


Figure 1: Site location map

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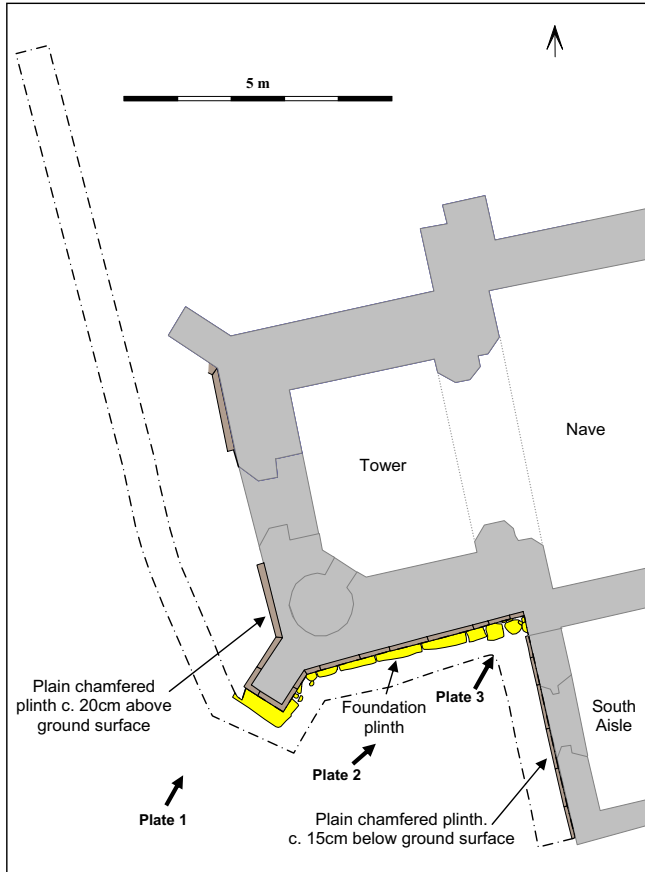


Figure 2: All features



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4; Church of All Saints. Looking NW.