



ST MARY'S CHURCH, MARSTON MORETAINE, BEDFORDSHIRE

Precautionary Archaeological Attendance, Observation, Recording and Reporting

Albion Archaeology Project No: SM1141

Report No: 2005/73

Accession No: BEDFM 2005.333

Date: 28th January 2005

Introduction

In November 2005 a service trench was excavated as part of improvement work at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire (NGR: SP 997 412). The Diocesan Archaeological Advisor issued a brief¹, recommending that the work be observed archaeologically in case there was a need to record evidence discovered or disturbed by it.

Albion Archaeology was invited by the project architect, Barry Wright acting on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, to undertake archaeological monitoring of the ground disturbance during insertion of the new gas pipe.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Matt Smith (Archaeological Supervisor) with the project managed by Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager). This report has been prepared by Matt Smith; the figure was produced by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician).

Site description

The Church of St Mary the Virgin (HER8106) is situated within a large churchyard on the southern edge of the village of Marston Moretaine, c.7 miles south-west of Bedford.

The churchyard is located at c.40m OD and slopes down gently south-eastwards to the Elstow Brook, which flows from the south-west to the north-east. The underlying geology principally comprises non-calcareous soils overlying Oxford Clay.

Fieldwork

The observation of the pipe trench took place over the two days of 6th - 7th November 2005. Excavation of the trenches was carried out by the site contractors with an archaeologist in attendance to examine the trenches when fully excavated (See Figure 1 for location of the trench).

¹ DAA (July 2005) *Brief for precautionary archaeological attendance, observation, recording and reporting at the church of St Mary, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire*



Historical Background

Parts of the church date to the early 14th century. The settlement of Marston Moretaine is recorded in Domesday Book and is, therefore, likely to have at least late Saxon origins. The original core of the settlement may have been located in the vicinity of the church. Several archaeological excavations within the village in recent years have produced evidence for Saxo-Norman and medieval occupation.

Trench Location

The pipe trench was approximately 85m long and 0.30m to 0.40m wide. After entering the churchyard at its northern entrance, the trench ran nearly due south as it traced the eastern edge of a small pathway. After c.50m it mirrored a slight south-easterly turn in the pathway. Thereafter, it left the course of the path and cut across the churchyard in a north-easterly direction, running for 12m to the church's now sealed south door. The trench was excavated using a mini-digger.

Observations

No archaeological features were visible, either in section or plan, within the pipe trench. However the trench did highlight changes in geology and the presence of what appeared to be relatively modern, made ground.

Throughout the first 15m of the northern end of the trench, the overburden consisted of 0.20m-0.25m of topsoil (100) (see Figure 1), overlying 0.30m of sandy, gravelly subsoil (101) which in turn sealed undisturbed orange/brown sandy gravel. Over the next 11m of the trench, a similar depth of topsoil overlay a firm brown/green clay. The bottom of the trench never exceeded the depth of this deposit, which contained no artefacts and is interpreted as an undisturbed geological deposit.

Beyond this point, there is a visible downwards slope to the path and the clay was sealed by a friable, grey/brown silty clay which had moderate inclusions of red brick and tile and was occasionally inter-mixed with a more loamy grave earth (102). This deposit was present throughout the remaining length of the trench; the undisturbed clay was never exposed again.

Conclusions

The results of the observations demonstrate that the course of the pipe trench initially ran on undisturbed geological strata, first gravel and then clay. As it neared the church and as the clay dipped down, the trench was dug into a relatively modern layer of made ground seemingly filling the drop in ground level.

No archaeological features, *in situ* burials, or artefacts of archaeological significance were revealed in the course of the work.

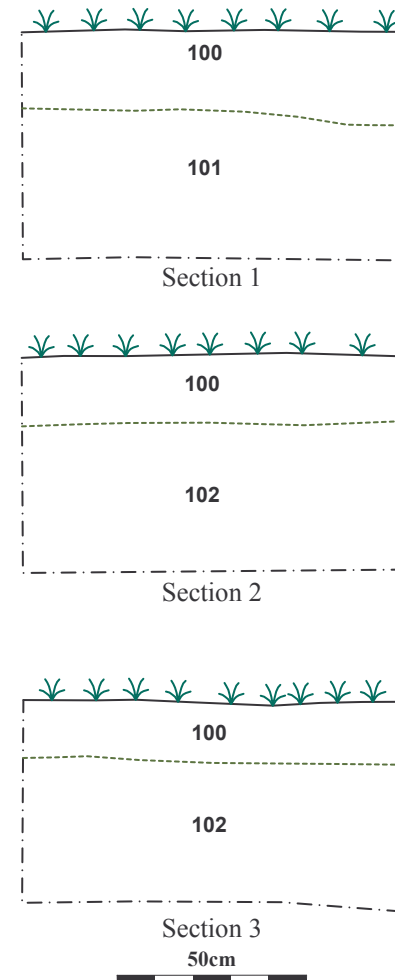
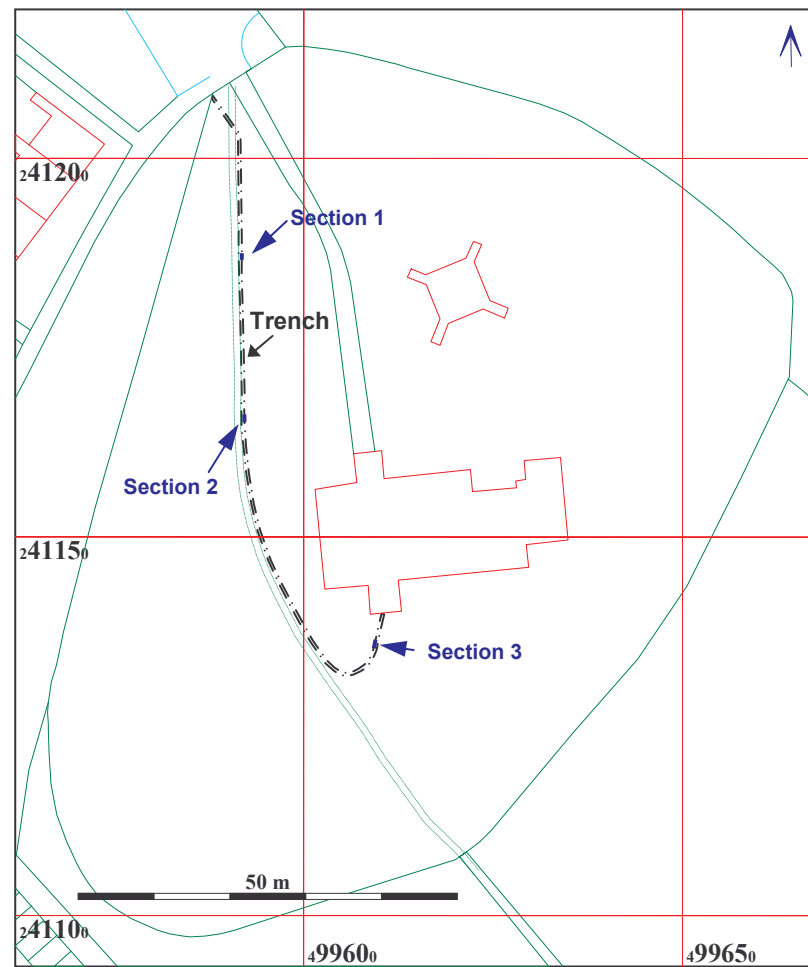
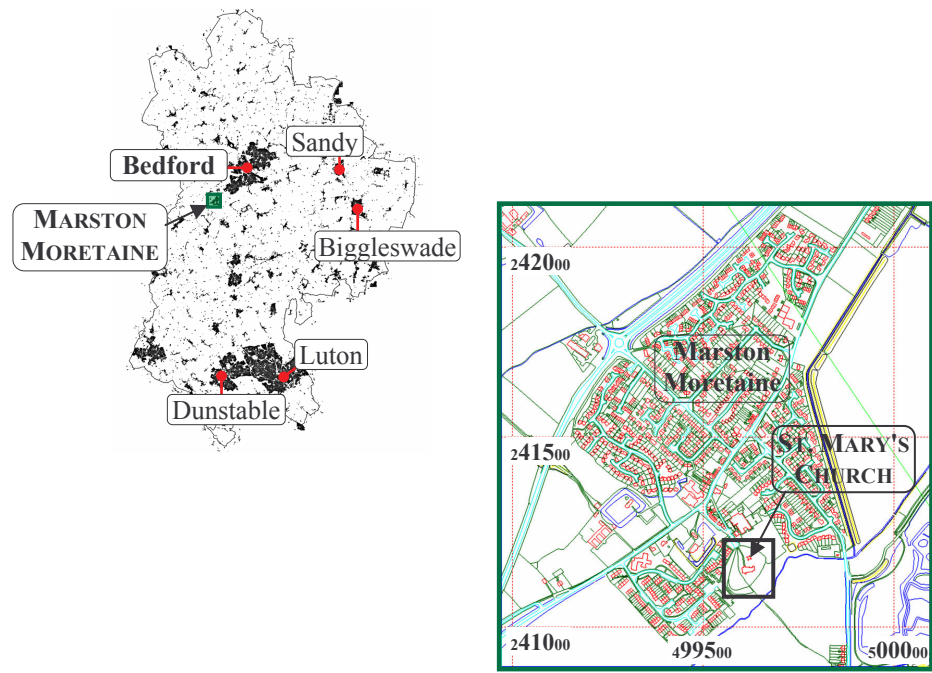


Figure 1: Site location map and all features
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