

**ST MARY'S CHURCH
FELMERSHAM
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
AND INVESTIGATION**

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Produced for:
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on behalf of
St Mary's Church PCC



1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by the Victor Farrar Partnership on behalf of St Mary's Parochial Church Council to oversee groundworks associated with the installation of a new toilet at St Mary's Church, Felmersham, Bedfordshire, 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) as a precaution against the discovery of archaeological remains during the building works.

All work was carried out in accordance with a design brief issued by the DAA.

2. BACKGROUND

St Mary's Church is located on the corner of the High Road and Church End, in the north of the village, and is centred on grid reference SP99140 57845 (Figure 1).

The church consists of a nave, aisles, north transept, central tower and chancel. It was constructed between 1220 and 1240, with alterations and additions carried out to the roof and the tower probably in the 14th century. The oak screen separating the chancel and the choir dates to the 15th century.

Other than the small porch on the south side, the ground plan remains much the same as laid out in 1220. The church yard and cemetery were extended to the east in 1918.

3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The new toilet is located in the north-east corner of the north transept. The groundworks associated with this facility comprised the hand-excavation of a trench for the installation of drainage and water supply pipes to connect the toilet to existing services located to the south of the churchyard (Figures 1 and 2). A pit was also excavated adjacent to the east wall of the transept for the installation of an inspection chamber.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The groundworks that required archaeological monitoring and recording took place between the 9th and 11th March 2009. The methods employed during the project complied with the Institute for Field 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).

Plans and sections were drawn and a digital photographic record was made of the works and all significant features. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence. A detailed description of all deposits is contained in the Appendix.

In accordance with the DAA brief and *Taking Care of Human Remains* (2000), issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans in 2000, all human bone was left securely on site for reburial.

A copy of this report and the project archive, which comprises all written and photographic records, will be stored at Bedford Museum under accession number 2009.35.



Copies of the report will also be forwarded to the Historic Environment Record located at Borough Hall, Bedford, and the OASIS online database.

5. RESULTS

The trench running west from the north transept measured 14m in length, with its depth sloping from 0.45-0.60m west to east. The portion of the trench running NNW-SSE, parallel to the east wall of the chancel and terminating at the churchyard wall measured 21m in length and 0.65m in depth. The trench running NE-SW to the south of the church was 24m in length and 0.45m deep. The width of the excavations varied from 0.25-0.30m.

The topsoil (100) comprised dark grey silty loam and was a maximum of 0.15m thick. Beneath this was heavily disturbed subsoil (102) which comprised dark brownish grey clay silt with occasional small stones and fragments of limestone. At no point in the excavations was the subsoil fully removed and natural geological deposits reached.

The articulated remains of three individuals (108), (111) and (114) were uncovered within the subsoil at the southern end of the NNW-SSE trench (Figure 2). The skulls and neck vertebrae and upper limb bones were visible for individuals (108) and (111). A further, apparently disarticulated skull (107) was located directly above individual (108). Inhumation (114) showed both femurs, part of the pelvis and the tips of the radius and ulna. All the articulated remains were aligned E-W and appeared at a depth of 0.40-0.50m below ground level. Each of these burials were probably contained within separate graves although no edges for these excavations were discernable. This is probably due to the disturbed nature of the subsoil and the similarity in colour and composition between grave fill and subsoil.

To the north of the individual burials a cluster of disarticulated remains representing at least four individuals (104) was uncovered at a depth of 0.20 - 0.60m. The remains included four skulls and numerous long-bones. Again, no grave cut was visible but the remains were most likely contained within a single pit.

In the section of trench adjacent to the east wall of the chancel, a mid yellowish grey layer with frequent inclusions of mortar and limestone (101) was visible just below the topsoil.

Throughout the excavation of the pipe trench, disarticulated human remains were observed within the subsoil.

6. CONCLUSION

The archaeological observation of the construction groundworks at St Mary's Church, Felmersham identified the remains of at least nine individuals within four separate burials located to the south-east of the church. Although there were a number of gravestones in the area, none appeared to be associated with the remains uncovered.

No evidence to enable the burials to be dated was recovered from the graves although the lack of coffin remains and the relative shallowness of the burials suggest a medieval or early post-medieval date.

The rubble layer identified at the east end of the church probably represents evidence of building activity in that area and may be associated with the construction of the church itself or later drainage works.



APPENDIX: CONTEXT SUMMARY



Area: 1

Extent (ha):

OS Co-ordinates: SP9914057845

Description: Trench for the installation of drainage and water supply pipes

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silty loam occasional small stones. Thickness: 0.15m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Spread	Friable mid yellow grey rubble frequent small-medium stones. Limestone and mortar. Thickness 0.15 Max.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Subsoil	Friable dark brown grey clay silt occasional small stones. Not fully excavated. Visible thickness: 0.55m Max.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Grave	E-W dimensions: max depth 0.5m. Grave cut not visible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Human skeleton	Remains of at least four individuals. Depth below surface: 0.2-0.6m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
105	Backfill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt occasional small-medium stones. Thickness: 0.5m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
106	Grave	Dimensions: max depth 0.55m. Grave cut not visible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
107	Human skeleton	Skull only. Depth from surface: 0.3m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
108	Human skeleton	Depth from surface 0.45m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
109	Backfill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt occasional small-medium stones. Thickness: 0.55m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
110	Grave	E-W dimensions: max depth 0.55m. Grave cut not visible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
111	Human skeleton	Depth from surface: 0.40m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
112	Backfill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt occasional small-medium stones. Thickness: 0.55m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
113	Grave	E-W dimensions: max depth 0.45m. Grave cut not visible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
114	Human skeleton	Depth from surface: 0.5m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
115	Backfill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt occasional small-medium stones. Thickness: 0.45m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

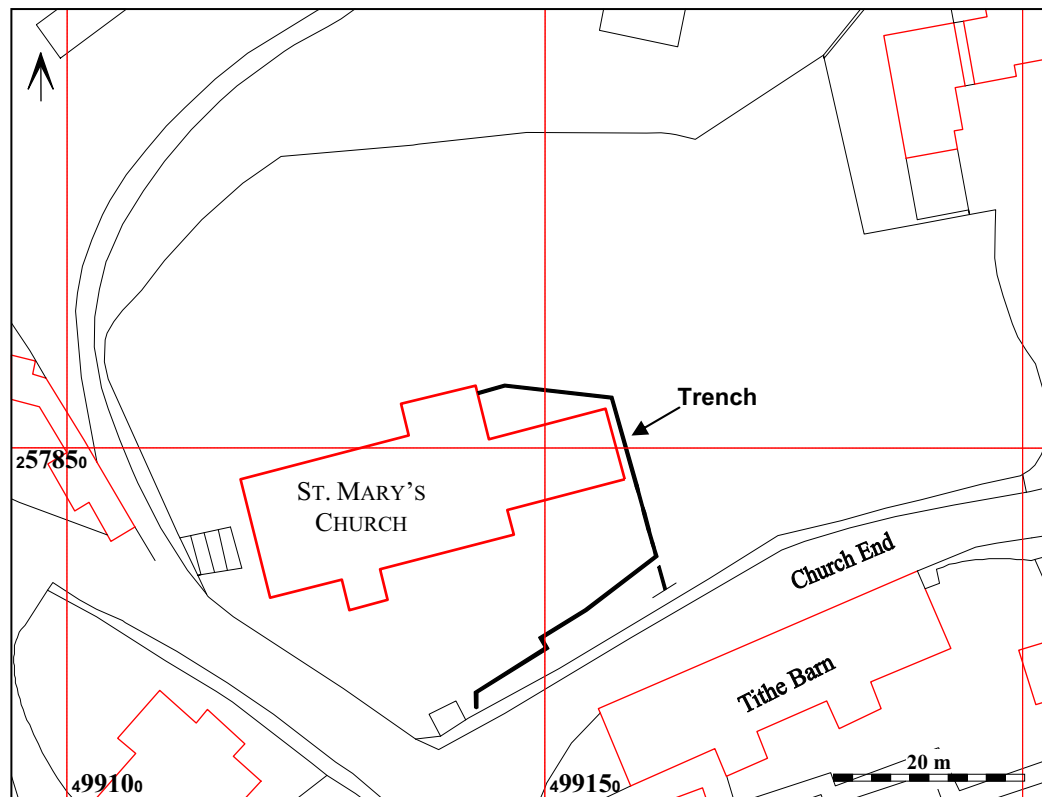
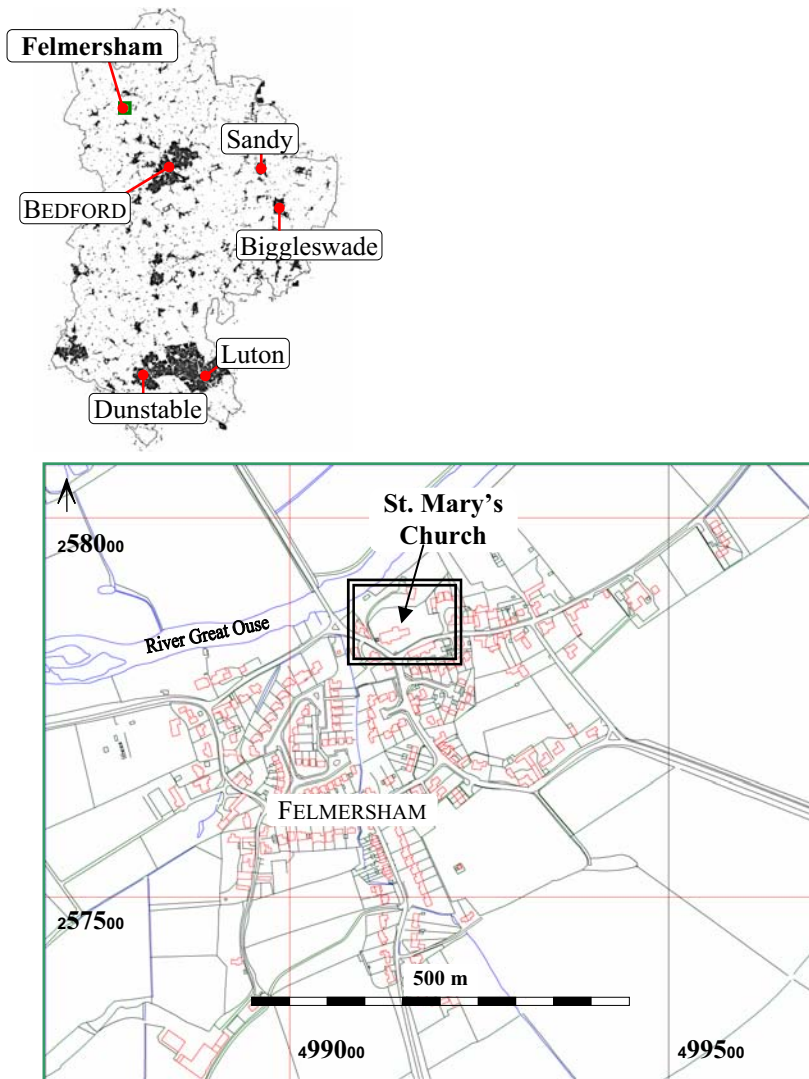
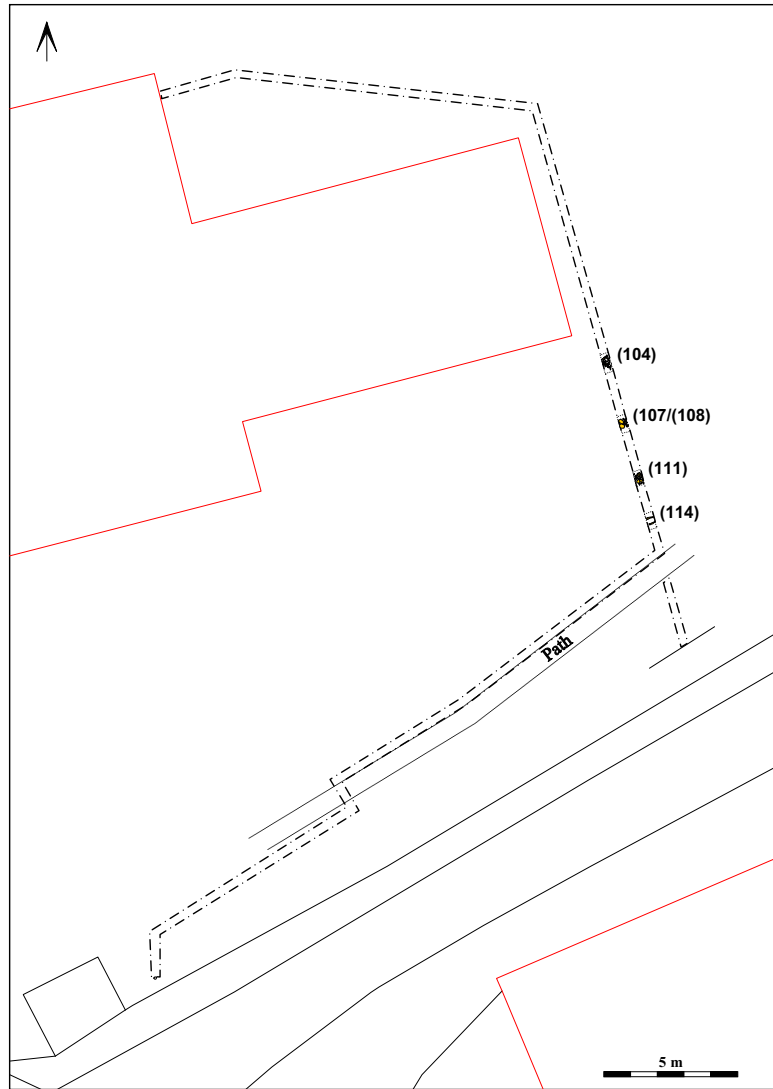


Figure 1: Site location plan

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Human remains (104)



Trench along east wall of Chancel.
Looking south



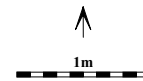
Human remains (107)(08)
Scale 25cm



Trench beside path.
Looking south west



Human remains (111)
Scale 25cm



Human remains within (114)
Scale 25cm

Figure 2: Detail of works

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