

**CHURCH OF ST GILES
TOTTERNHOE
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
AND INVESTIGATION**

Project: SGT1517

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Produced for:
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Architect Ltd.

on behalf of
The Church of St Giles PCC



1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Bruce Deacon, Architect Ltd on behalf of The Church of St Giles Parochial Church Council to oversee groundworks associated with drainage works at the church in Totternhoe, 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 (2009).

2. BACKGROUND

The Church of St Giles is located in the south-east part of Totternhoe, known as Church End, on the western side of Church Road, centred on grid reference SP98840 20885 (Figure 1).

The church consists of a chancel with a north vestry, a nave with north and south aisles, a south porch and west tower. The 14th-century chancel is the earliest surviving part of the building with the remainder being in the late Perpendicular style.

3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The purpose of the works was to replace an existing French drain around the outer face of the church walls with a new ventilated gravel drain and soakaways. The groundworks involved the removal of the existing fill of the drain, the insertion of a perforated drainage pipe and refilling the trench with coarse gravel. The drainage pipe was then connected to three new gravel-filled soakaway pits.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring of the groundworks was undertaken during four visits to the church between 17th and 26th June 2009. 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).

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 Luton Museum. 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

Plans and sections of the observations are shown in Figure 2.

5.1 East end of south aisle

Stonework uncovered in the angle between the east end of the south aisle and the south side of the chancel was cleaned and planned.

The foundations of the chancel (6) consisted of a plinth made from small unshaped blocks of Totternhoe stone that projected 0.2m from the face of the chancel wall.

A substantial block of stonework (9) below the east wall of the south aisle appeared to meet the chancel foundation in a straight join. This block of masonry was at least 3m long from north to south and up to 1.2m wide from east to west. It consisted of medium and large sized blocks of Totternhoe stone, mostly unshaped with one large reused, faced block. The masonry was irregular in plan. Its eastern (outer) edge ran parallel to the wall of the aisle for 1m, was angled towards the wall in its central section and widened out again towards the southern end. The widest section projected 1.2m from the face of the wall. A single sherd of 14th- to 15th-century sand-tempered pottery was partially embedded into the eastern edge of masonry (9).

5.2 South of the church

A pipe trench 5.3m long and 0.7–0.9m deep was dug southwards from the south side of the church to a 1.2m square, 1.7m deep soakaway pit.

The deposits within the trench consisted of approximately 300mm of topsoil (10) above a deep graveyard sub-soil (11) over a geological deposit consisting of light grey clay and chalk (12).

Some large blocks of Totternhoe stone rubble were observed at around 2m from the wall of the church at a depth of c. 0.5m.

A large, stone-filled soakaway pit was bisected by the trench at 4m from the church. It may have been part of earlier drainage works undertaken during the 1980s.

Human remains observed in this part of the works consisted of a very small number of disarticulated bones within the pipe trench and a larger amount within the soakaway pit. The bone found in the soakaway pit included three mandibles, indicating at least three redeposited burials. The remains were associated with nails and iron coffin handles.

5.3 West of the church

Two trenches were dug at the west end of the church. One situated at the north-west corner of the tower consisted of a trench 6.8m long and 0.65–0.7m deep, connected to a 1.2m square, 1.5m deep soakaway pit. The other, at the south-west corner of the tower consisted of a trench 4.2m long and 0.60–0.68m deep with a 1.2m square, 1.65m deep soakaway pit.



The deposits within the excavations consisted of approximately 300mm of topsoil (10) above a deep graveyard sub-soil (11) over a geological deposit consisting of chalk bedrock (12).

Modern intrusions consisted of a stone-filled soakaway pit and an electrical cable encountered in the south-west trench between 2m and 3m from the wall of the church.

Human remains observed in this part of the churchyard consisted of a small number of disarticulated bones within the pipe trenches and a larger amount within the soakaway pits. The north-western pit contained a large amount of human remains found in the lower part of the pit. These included the lower half of an adult burial, the lower half of a young adult burial (femurs with unfused epiphyses), one adult and one sub-adult skull in the east part of the pit. Some of the burials were associated with plain iron coffin handles. The south-western pit contained a smaller amount of human remains consisting of the lower part of one burial, the skull from another in addition to disarticulated remains. One of the burials was associated with coffin handles attached to decorated stamped metal plates.

The geological deposits in western part of the churchyard consisted of chalk bedrock. The upper part of the rock occurred between 0.9m and 1.3m below the present ground surface. The deeper graves had been partly cut into the bedrock.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The block of stonework below the east end of the south aisle appears to be the remains of a foundation. A straight join with the foundation of the chancel (6) suggests that it was built up against the chancel and is therefore later than the 14th century chancel. A single sherd of late medieval pottery embedded into the foundation shows that it was not built before the 14th century. The size and distinctive shape of the foundation suggest that it may have been intended to support stonework in the angle between the chancel and the east end of the south aisle. It is possible that the design was changed during construction work or that the east end of the aisle has been altered subsequently.

No *in situ* burials and few disarticulated bones were found in the uppermost part of the soil profile. All of the *in situ* burials occurred below 1m deep and so were only revealed in the deeper excavations for the soakaway pits. The presence of coffin nails and handles indicates that a number of the burials were associated with coffins. The coffin handles had a variety of backing plates, some plain rectangular backing plates and some shaped. The coffin fittings are similar to ones described from the graveyard of St Benedict's Church, Norwich which are dated to the 18th and 19th centuries (Margeson 1993).

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Margeson, S., 1993. *Norwich Households: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Norwich Survey Excavations 1971-1978*. East Anglian Archaeology 58

DAA 2009. *Brief for Archaeological Investigation and Reporting at the Church of St Giles, Totternhoe, Bedfordshire*.



APPENDIX: CONTEXT SUMMARY



Area: 1

Extent (ha):

OS Co-ordinates: SP9884020885

Description: Gravel drain and soakaway pits

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
1	Modern intrusion	Cut for modern gravel drain, installed during 1980's	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Fill	Loose light yellow brown gravel . Gravel fill of modern gravel drain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Subsoil	Loose light yellow brown silty clay moderate small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Wall	South wall of chancel.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Foundation trench	Inferred cut for foundations (6) of chancel wall (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Foundation	Foundation of chancel wall (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Wall	East end wall of south aisle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Foundation trench	Inferred cut for foundations (9) of east wall of south aisle (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9		Foundation of east wall of south aisle (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	Topsoil	Dark grey clay silt . Turf and topsoil layer across graveyard area	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Subsoil	Mid grey silty clay moderate small chalk, occasional large chalk. Grave-earth horizon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Natural	Undisturbed geological deposit. Chalk bedrock	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Figure 1: Site location plan

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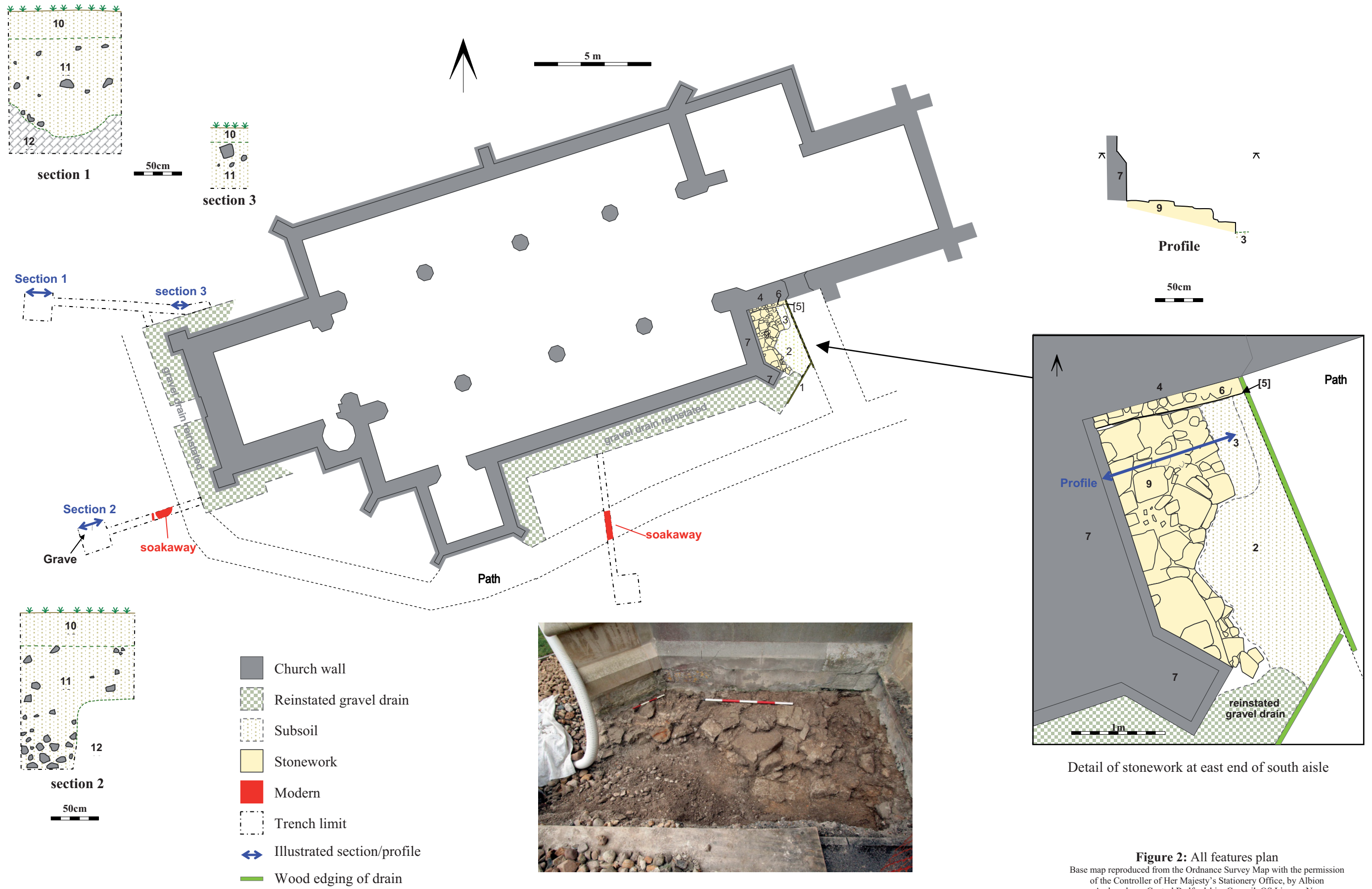


Figure 2: All features plan
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