

**CHURCH OF ST MARY  
NORTHCHURCH  
HERTFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION,  
RECORDING AND REPORTING**

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## Preface

*Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.*

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## Version History

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1.0	10/08/2009	n/a

## Structure of the Report

Section 1 is an introduction to the project. The methodology and results of the fieldwork are presented in Sections 2 and 3. Section 4 contains conclusions drawn from the results of the project, while Section 5 is a bibliography.

Appendix 1 contains detailed descriptions of the archaeological deposits recorded on site.

## Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

DAA	Diocesan Archaeological Adviser
DAC	Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans
HAT	Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (now Archaeological Solutions)
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
<i>Procedures Manual</i>	Albion Archaeology 2001. <i>Procedures Manual. Volume 1: Fieldwork</i> , 2nd edition



### **Non-Technical Summary**

*Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Steven Melvin of Atelier MLM Architecture and Design, on behalf of Northchurch Parochial Church Council, to carry out archaeological investigation and recording for drainage works at the Church of St Mary, Northchurch, Hertfordshire. The church, a Grade I listed building, stands within the lower slopes of the Bulbourne valley at (NGR) SP 9744 0885, with the river Bulbourne located c. 35m to the north-east.*

*Northchurch lies c. 2km to the north-west of Berkhamsted, which was once in the parish of Northchurch. The church of St Mary dates from the late Saxon period, although the majority of the fabric is 13th–15th century in date. The north aisle is the most recent construction, dating to the 19th century.*

*The ground-works comprised the excavation of a drainage trench along the north wall of the church, which was hand-excavated under close archaeological supervision. The ground-works revealed a mixture of articulated and semi-articulated human remains by the north-west corner of the church, which are likely to predate construction of the north aisle of the church. These were left in situ as far as possible. The remainder of the trench revealed only disarticulated human remains, with no archaeological features identified.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 *Planning Background*

A condition placed on planning consent for drainage works at the Church of St Mary, Northchurch, Hertfordshire required the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation and recording, the requirements for which were set out by the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser (DAA 2009). Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the work by Steven Melvin of Atelier MLM Architecture and Design, on behalf of Northchurch Parochial Church Council.

### 1.2 *Site Location*

The church, a Grade I listed building, occupies an elevation of *c.* 115m OD. It lies within the lower slopes of the Bulbourne valley at (NGR) SP 9744 0885 with the river Bulbourne located *c.* 35m to the north-east (Fig. 1). The underlying geology comprises flinty and chalky silty clays, overlying chalk bedrock.

### 1.3 *Archaeological Background*

Northchurch lies *c.* 2km to the north-west of Berkhamsted, forming a linear settlement along the line of Roman Akeman Street. Prior to the construction of the Church of St Peter in Berkhamsted, the Church of St Mary was also the parish church of Berkhamsted, which was formerly included within the parish of Northchurch.

The Church of St Mary dates from the late Saxon period, of which only the south wall and part of the west wall survive. Much of the existing fabric of the chancel and transepts is 13th–14th century in date. The tower is 15th century in date, while the north aisle and porch are of 19th-century date (DAA 2009).



## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 *Description of Ground-works*

The ground-works comprised the excavation of a French drain trench (0.25–0.5m wide x 0.5m deep) along the north wall of the church, terminating in a circular manhole (0.45m diameter x 0.5m deep) at its eastern end (Fig. 2). The trench was hand-excavated under close archaeological supervision.

### 2.2 *Archaeological Methodology*

All ground-works associated with the drainage works were carried out between 20th and 23rd July 2009. 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 *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991), and Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (2001).

A plan and digital photographic record was made of all significant features, and all deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence. Following consultation with the DAA, and in line with the guidelines *Taking Care of Human Remains*, issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans in 2000, all human bone and related artefacts were left securely on site for immediate reburial.



### 3. RESULTS

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Excavation of the drainage trench revealed a layer of topsoil (1) that was 0.12m thick, overlying at least 0.38m of made ground or construction debris (3), probably associated with the construction of the north aisle's foundations. Beneath this, a layer of subsoil (2) was recorded, at a minimum depth of 0.4m; this was encountered only at the west end of the trench, where the depth of made ground was shallowest.

Semi-articulated remains of at least two humans (7) were revealed in the base of the western end of the trench (Fig. 2). Ribs, a skull, a foot and the lower part of a leg were exposed, as well as iron coffin handles and lead strips. They probably relate to the two child burials identified in Test Pit 3 during evaluation of the site (HAT 2001). These remains were left *in situ* and the depth of the trench was reduced to 0.4m in this area.

Articulated human remains (5) were also revealed *c.* 1m further east within grave [4], cutting subsoil (2) and sealed by made ground (3). Only the skull was exposed and lifted, as the rest of the skeleton lay at a greater depth than the base of the trench. The east end of the grave cut for a child burial that lay outside the trench, located by a stone marker, was observed in the side of the trench. No bones were exposed. Disarticulated human bone was recovered throughout the trench, in slightly greater quantities towards the west end.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

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The ground-works revealed unmarked inhumations by the north-west corner of the church (Fig. 2). Their east–west alignment is indicative of Christian burial. The articulated and semi-articulated remains were buried at a sufficient depth to be preserved *in situ* beneath the drain, except for the skull in grave [4], which was lifted and left securely on site for reburial.

The close proximity of the cemetery remains to the wall of the north aisle, and the fact that the burials were sealed by made ground, suggest that the remains predate construction of the north aisle of the church in the 19th century. No other archaeological features or significant archaeological deposits were exposed.





## 5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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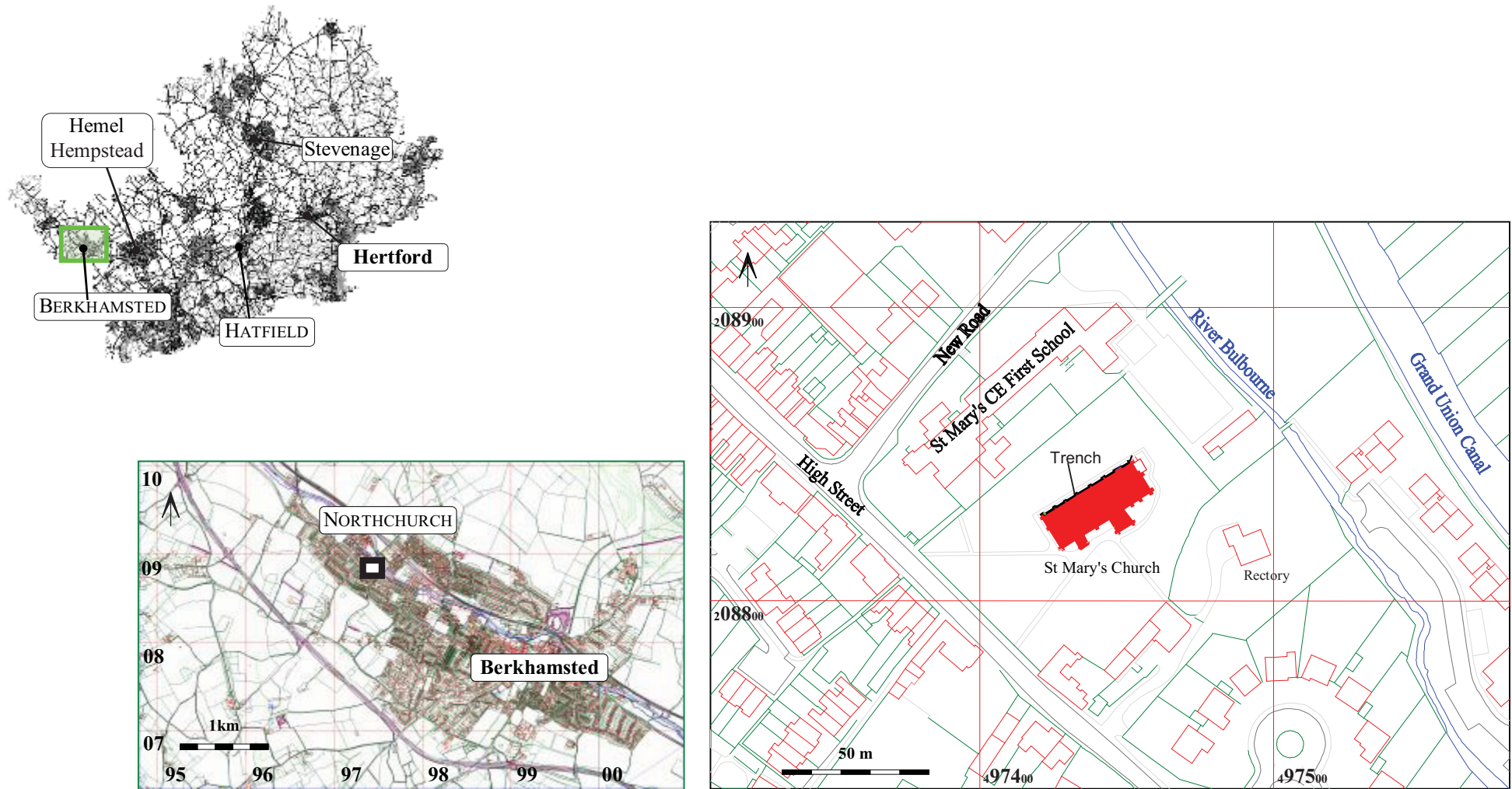
IFA 1999a. *Code of Conduct*

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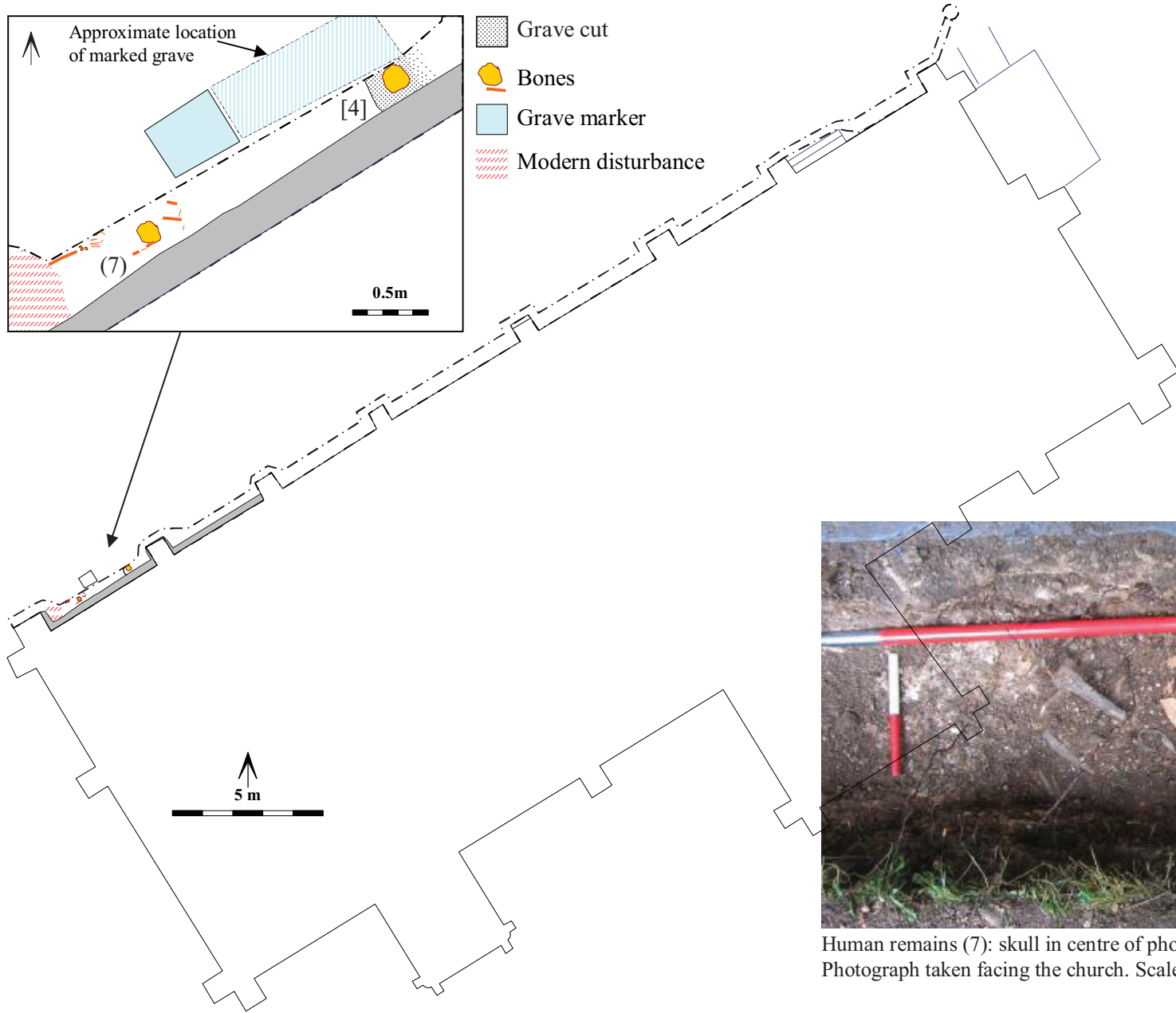
## 6. APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT SUMMARY

Context:	Type:	Description
1	Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown silty loam; occasional small–large stones. 0.12m thick.
2	Subsoil	Friable mid-orangey brown silty sand; occasional small–large stones. Only exposed at west end of trench.
3	Made ground	Friable mid-greyish orange silty sand; occasional small–large fragments of brick/tile; moderate small–large stones. At least 0.38m thick.
4	Grave	Oval, NE–SW. Dimensions: min. breadth 0.4m, min. length 1.05m. Grave cut only partially revealed within trench.
5	Human skeleton	Single burial. Only skull was exposed and excavated, at west end of grave.
6	Backfill	Friable mid-orangey grey silty sand; occasional small–medium stones.
7	Human remains	Semi-articulated bones of at least two skeletons: foot, lower leg, ribs and skull. Iron coffin handles and lead strips also present.



**Figure 1: Site location plan**

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Albion Archaeology, Central Bedfordshire Council. OS Licence No. 100017358(LA). © Crown Copyright.



Grave [4]. Photograph taken facing the church. Scale 0.2m



Human remains (7): skull in centre of photograph, with semi-articulated leg to the right. Photograph taken facing the church. Scales 1m and 0.2m

**Figure 2:** All features plan