

**THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN
WOOTTON
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
AND INVESTIGATION**

Project: SMW1518

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on behalf of
The Parochial Church Council,
Church of St Mary the Virgin, Wootton



1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by MEB Design Ltd on behalf of the Parochial Church Council to oversee groundworks associated with the removal of pews in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Wootton, 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.

2. BACKGROUND

The Church of St Mary the Virgin lies in the village of Wootton, south of Bedford, centred on grid reference TL 0037 4507 (Figure 1).

The building consists of an aisled nave, chancel with vestry, west tower and north and south porches, and is mostly constructed of local limestone. It dates mainly from the 14th and 15th centuries with substantial restoration works during the 19th century.

3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The objective of the building works was to form an open mingling area inside the north door and to provide wheelchair spaces adjacent to the central aisle (Figure 2).

The creation of the mingling area involved the removal of four rows of pews in the north aisle, along with their wooden plinth. The area exposed by the removal of the plinth (3.55m by 2.25m) was then excavated by the contractor to a depth of 150mm below the surrounding floor level to form a base for a stone flagged floor (Figure 3).

Wheelchair spaces were formed in the nave by shortening two rows of pews. A square section of the planking in the underlying wooden plinth was removed and reframed. The ground beneath was excavated by the contractor to a depth of 150mm below the surrounding floor level (Figure 4).

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring took place between 23rd and 29th March 2010. 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).

Observations and measurements were recorded on pro forma recording sheets and a digital photographic record was made of the works.

5. RESULTS

The first observations were made following the removal of the plinth in the north aisle and the two sections in the nave.

The surface exposed beneath the plinth in the north aisle was 120mm below floor level. The surface consisted of uncompacted soil and accumulated dust with building debris which included fragments of limestone and roofing slates. Masonry forming the inner face of the north aisle wall was exposed by the removal of the pews. This was coursed



limestone rubble with small slabs and larger, roughly squared blocks measuring approximately 200mm. It was bonded with soft, light yellowish brown mortar which was missing in places leaving voids between the stones. Larger roughly shaped blocks at the east end of the walling formed the west side of the north door. The masonry was of the same character throughout with similar materials and finish (Figure 5).

The surface beneath the sections of plinth removed in the nave lay 60mm below the adjacent tiled floor surface. It consisted of uncompacted soil and accumulated dust.

The works were inspected following ground reduction to formation level which was 150mm below floor level. The area in the north aisle contained a firm mid yellow brown silty clay soil with fragments of limestone debris and mortar (Figure 6). The two small areas in the nave contained loose grey soil with fragments of mortar.

The excavations beneath the pews in the nave and the north aisle produced no significant observations. Due to the voids beneath the pews only a limited depth of soil had to be excavated to reach formation level, limiting the potential for archaeological observations.

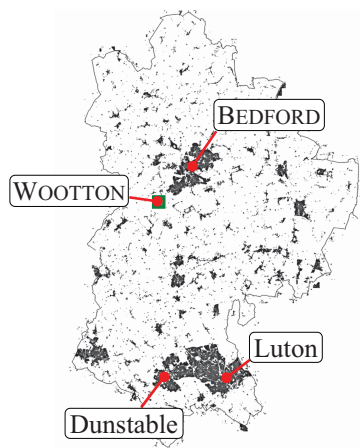


Figure 1: Site location plan

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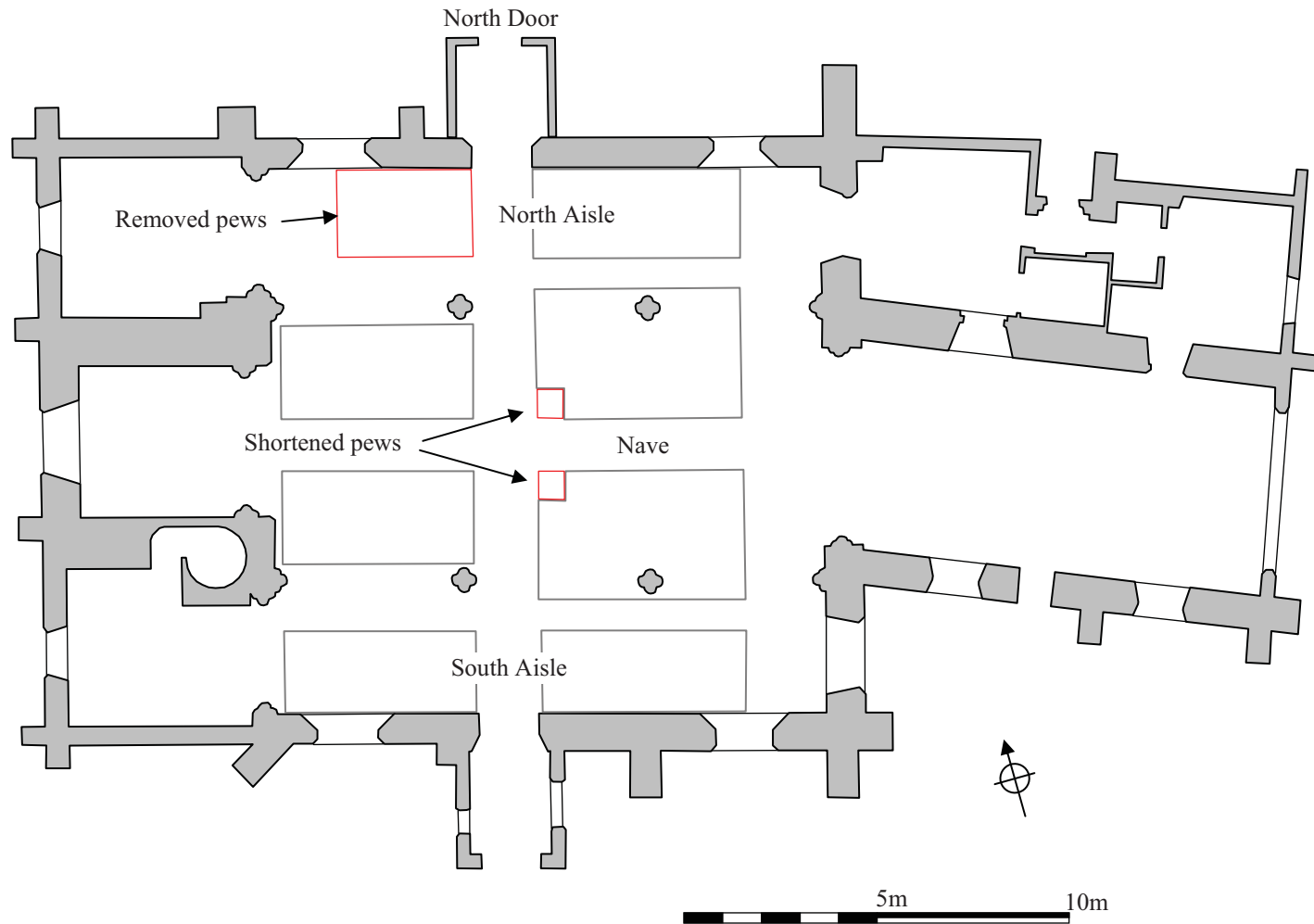


Figure 2: Location of building works (based on MEB Design Ltd survey)



Figure 3: Location of works in north aisle



Figure 4: Location of works in nave



Figure 5: Exposed masonry in north aisle



Figure 6: Trench in north aisle