

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: ST MARY'S CHURCH NORTH MARSTON BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NGR: SP 7770 2270

on behalf of St Mary's Ecumenical Church Council



Ralph S Brown BSc Hons

July 2008

ASC: 1088/NMC/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC project code:</i>	NMC	<i>ASC project no:</i>	1088
<i>OASIS ref:</i>		<i>Event/Accession no:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Buckinghamshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	North Marston		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	North Marston		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	SP 7770 2270		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	0.4 ha		
<i>Present use:</i>	Church		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Extension to the north aisle		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	Pre-planning		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	Aylesbury Vale District Council		
<i>Date of fieldwork:</i>	15/07/08-		
<i>Commissioned by:</i>	Pamela Ward Chapel Farm Whipsnade Dunstable Bedfordshire LU6 2LL		
<i>Client:</i>	St Mary's Ecumenical Church Council St Mary's Church North Marston Buckinghamshire		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Pamela Ward		

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Ralph S. Brown	<i>Date:</i>	30 th July 2008
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<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
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<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
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Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In July 2008 ASC undertook an archaeological evaluation in the churchyard of St. Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire, ahead of the construction of an extension to the northern aisle of the church. Two trenches were excavated butting up against the church. Each was found to contain the deep disturbed deposits characteristic of old churchyards where burials have been continually deposited over centuries. Four burials were found, two in each trench. Although this high concentration of interments is likely to continue right across the area of the new development, the depth of the skeletons found was below the formation level of the extension floor. A number of stones at the northwestern corner of the north aisle of the church indicate that there was additional reinforcement of the church in this area. It was not clear whether this strengthening was part of the construction of the church or a later repair.

1. Introduction

1.1 In July 2008 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an excavation at St Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire. The project was commissioned by Pamela Ward on behalf of *St. Mary's Ecumenical Church Council*, and was carried out according to a brief (Radford 2007) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *Aylesbury Vale District Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), *Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service*, and a project design prepared by ASC (Semmelmann, 2008).

1.2 *Planning Background*

This evaluation was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), in order to inform proposals for the development of the site.

1.3 *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd*

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd (ASC) is an independent archaeological practice providing a full range of archaeological services including consultancy, field evaluation, mitigation and post-excavation studies, historic building recording and analysis. ASC is recognised as a *Registered Archaeological Organisation* by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

1.4 *Management*

The project was managed by Karin Semmelmann BA MA MIFA, and was carried out under the overall direction of Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA.

1.5 *The Site*

1.5.1 *Location & Description*

The site is located in the Aylesbury Vale administrative district at National Grid Reference NGR SP 7770 2270, in the medieval core of the village of North Marston (Fig. 1).

The church is situated to the southeast of the High Street and lies within the eastern section of the original churchyard, which has since been subdivided and redeveloped on the western side (Fig. 2).

The church is thought to predate the 13th century, with 13th, 14th and 19th century additions. The north aisle, with its arcade, was added c1260 according to the Royal Commission (RCHME 1913, 223-224). The chancel and clerestory are 15th century and may have been paid for by the Canons of Windsor in return for the remains of North Marston's late 13th century priest John Shorne. According to legend, Shorne captured the devil in a shoe and created a miraculous holy well, which consequently made North Marston an important pilgrimage site.

1.5.2 *Geology & Topography*

Soils in the area belong to the Denchworth association (Soil Survey 1983, 712b). These are described as "Slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils. Some fine loamy over clayey with only slight seasonal waterlogging and some permeable calcareous soils."

The British Geological Survey records the underlying geology as being glacio-fluvial deposits overlying Kimmeridge Clay (BDS Sheet 219). The site lies at an elevation of *c.*125m OD.

1.5.3 *Proposed Development*

The proposed development consists of an extension to the north aisle of the church, utilising the existing door (Fig. 3).

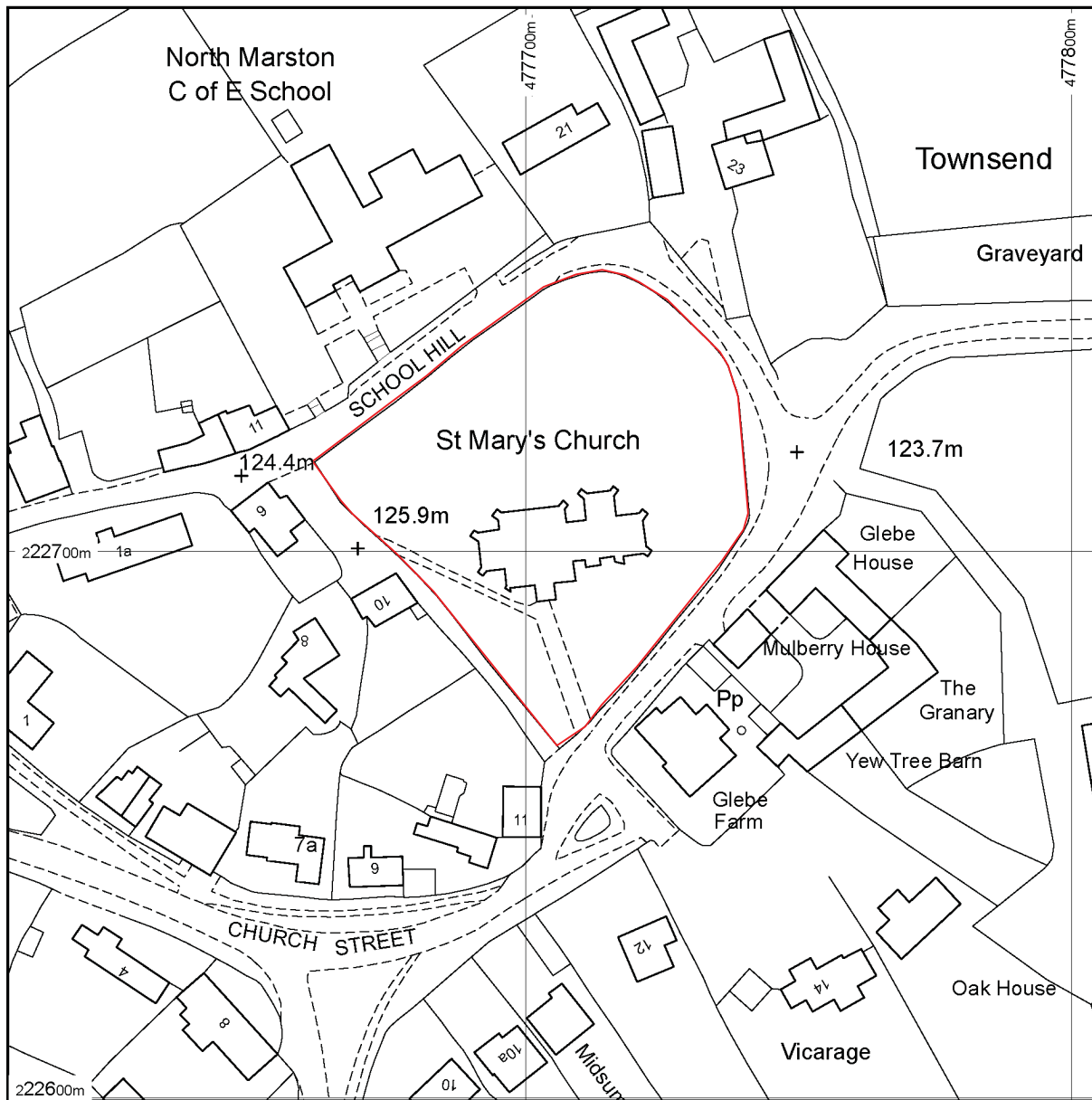


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

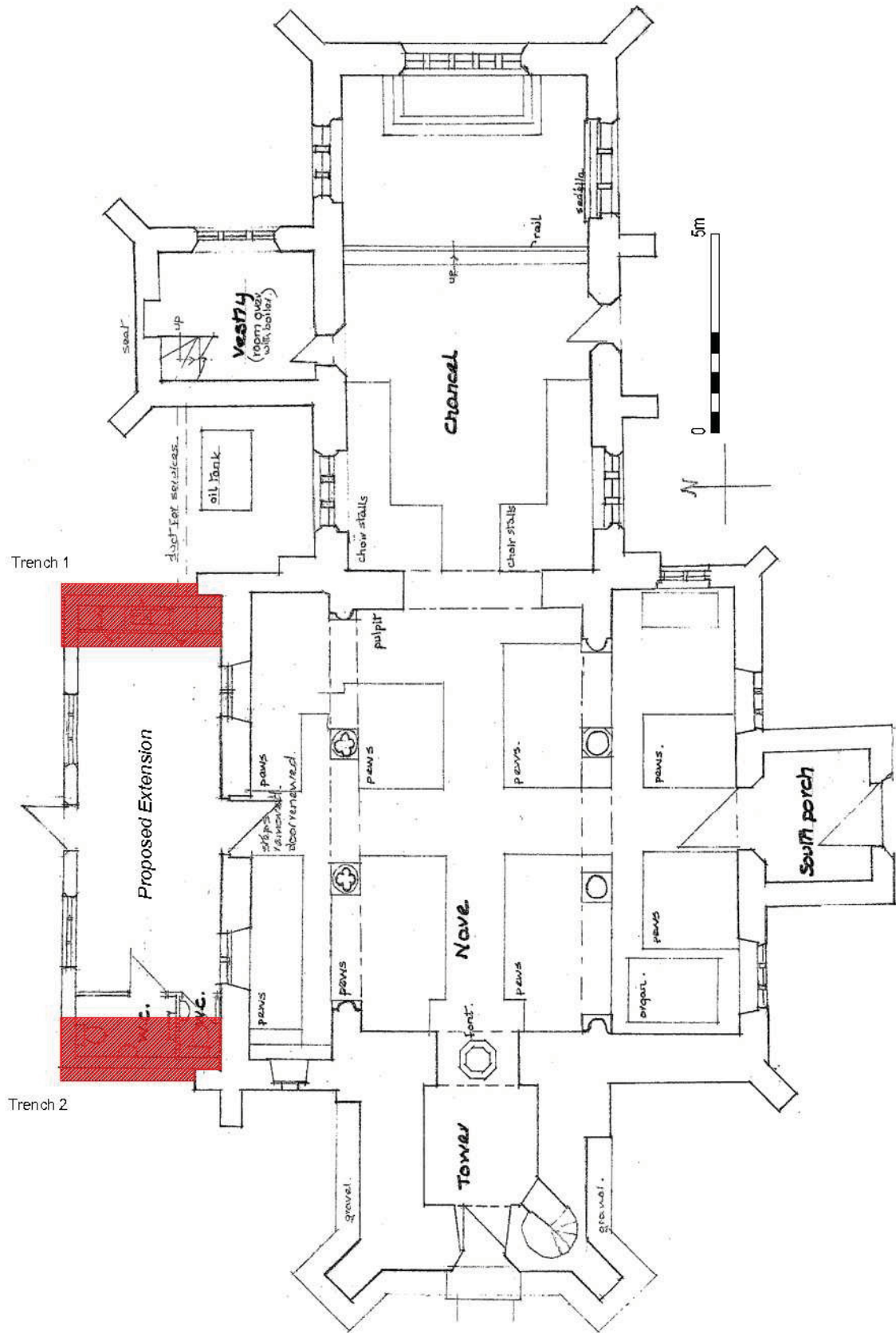


Figure 3: Proposed extension and trench location (scale 1:150)

2. Aims & Methods

2.1 *Aims*

As described in the brief (Section 6), the aims of the evaluation were to:

- Gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important archaeological remains
- Establish whether the extension will affect burials associated with the church and, if so, their likely number, date, state of preservation and depth of burial.
- Establish if any structural remains are present and, if so, establish their date and whether likely to be of secular or ecclesiastical nature.

2.2 *Standards*

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

2.3 *Methods*

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 7), which required:

- Subject to site constraints two 3m trenches should be excavated at 90 degrees to and abutting the external wall of the aisle, within the footprint of the proposed extension.
- Spoil heaps should be metal detected, bearing in mind the potential for pilgrimage tokens etc.

2.4 *Constraints*

Following a consultation with Pamela Ward (architect) and David Radford (AA) it was agreed to lengthen both the trenches to extend 4m from the church wall in order to encompass the full width of the extension footprint.

3. Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 The following section provides a summary of the readily available archaeological and historical background to the development site and its environs. The site lies within an area of archaeological and historical interest, and has the potential to reveal evidence of a range of periods.

This section has been compiled with information from Buckinghamshire County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), British History Online and ASC's own library.

3.2 **Saxon** (c.450-1066)

There are no entries in the SMR for anything earlier than a Saxon loom weight discovered during groundworks at 18 High Street (SMR 0718).

Before the conquest North Marston was held in three parts: Leofric, Earl Edwin's man, held a manor with 5 hides; Britwin, Earl Tosti's man, held 1 virgate and an unnamed third individual held 1 hide and 1 virgate under King Edward's jurisdiction. At Domesday the manor was held by Ranulf, with 6.5 hides and land for 6 ploughs. There were 8 villages, 3 smallholders with land for 3 ploughs and meadow for 2 ploughs. A second man Bernard had a separate holding of 1 hide and land for 1 plough with 1 smallholder (Radford 2007).

3.3 **Medieval** (1066-1500)

The development of North Marston in the medieval period appears to have been largely led by the cult of John Shorne, the rector of the parish in 1290. His remains were venerated after his death in 1314, and the church became the centre of a pilgrimage until the remains were appropriated by the Canons of Windsor in order to raise funds to complete St George's Chapel (VCH online).

Apart from the church, the archaeological remains of the medieval settlement include John Shorne's holy well (SMR 1324), the medieval moated site thought to have been the vicarage (SMR 286), 350m southeast of the parish church, the deer park to the northwest of the village (SMR 8046) and the ridge and furrow indicating the medieval agricultural system to the west of Portway (SMR 6399).

The church (SMR 2098) has a chancel with a two-storied north vestry, nave, north aisle, south aisle, south porch, and a west tower. The nave is the oldest part of the building, representing in plan an aisleless structure, to which a north aisle was added in the middle of the 13th century and a south aisle about 1320. The east end of this aisle was rebuilt c.1350, and a south porch added at the same time. The chancel with its vestry and the west tower are 15th century, as is the clerestory. The doorway in the north aisle wall, which is to be retained, is 14th century. The roofs are 16th century, with moulded timbers, traceried spandrels and corbels in the form of angels holding shields.

3.4 **Post-Medieval** (1500-1900)

A number of post-medieval sites remain in the village, including two windmills (SMR 2903 & 1668). These lie 170m northwest of the church and 350m southeast of the church respectively. A possible post-medieval pond or enclosure (SMR 2937) has been

observed on aerial photographs in the western part of the village and post-medieval features were recorded during evaluations to the south of Church Street (SMR 8052 & 8054).

Queen Victoria paid for the restoration of 1855, which was undertaken by Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt (Pevsner 2000, 584). The tower was restored in two phases in 2002/3 and 2005/6.

A number of post-medieval buildings survive, but many earlier ones were destroyed in a fire that broke out in the High Street in 1700 (VCH online).

4 Results

4.1 General

The two trenches were deturfed and c.0.20m of dark grey brown clay loam topsoil was hand excavated in each trench. In both trenches the topsoil contained large amounts of tile and post medieval pottery sherds, iron nails and several scraps of lead, glass and modern buttons. Below the topsoil no features were observed and so a 0.50m wide sondage was excavated down the length of each trench to determine the depth and nature of the deposits. Each excavated slot was positioned on the outer edge of each trench in order to take in the position of any piles that may be inserted along the limits of the proposed extension.

Detailed information regarding the trial trenches and their contents appears in Appendix 1.

4.2 Trench 1 (Fig. 4 & 5: Plates 1-4)

Trench location: Northeastern corner of the northern aisle

Trench orientation: North-south

Trench dimensions: 1.6m × 3.4m × 1.00m

The sondage on the eastern side of Trench 1 revealed a soft mid grey brown clayey silt layer (101) in the northern end of the trench (Plates 1 & 2). This had a maximum depth of 0.20m and contained frequent fragments of animal and human bone, tile and the occasional piece of glass.

Below (101) was a firm mid yellow brown silty clay (102) containing c.4% stones 0.04-0.10m in diameter. This layer contained frequent bone fragments, mainly human, medieval potsherds and tile. Both (101) and (102) are built up layers of the church yard which have been heavily disturbed and are indicative of the churchyard deposits in which burials have been continually interred over many centuries.

Two burials were found during the excavation of (102). In the northern end of the trench the vertebra, pelvic girdle, sacrum, two femurs and both the lower arms were uncovered of an adult skeleton, SK103, in an east-west supine position (Plate 3). The bones were at a depth of 0.94m below ground level and in a good condition. No age or sex for the skeleton could be determined as the remains were left in situ. A large ceramic drainage pipe on an east west alignment had been laid c.0.15m above this burial and may explain why no grave cut could be detected. No dating evidence was found with this skeleton.

The second burial, SK105, was found halfway down the trench at 0.93m below the ground level (Plate 4). The only bones that could be observed of this burial were 8 metatarsals protruding from the western section of the sondage. Pieces of degraded wood and nails were also found in association with SK105 and a grave cut, [104], could be faintly seen mainly because the grave fill, (106), was softer than (102) the layer the grave was cut into.

4.3 Trench 2 (Fig. 4 & 5: Plates 5-9)

Trench location: Northwestern corner of the northern aisle

Trench orientation: North-south

Trench dimensions: 1.6m×3.32m×0.90m

The 0.50m excavated sondage on the western side of Trench 2 revealed a soft mid grey brown clayey silt layer (201) in the northern end of the trench. This had a maximum depth of 0.30m and contained frequent fragments of unidentified bone and tile. It is likely to be the same layer as (101).

(201) overlay (202), a friable mid grey brown silty loam that contained frequent small stone, chalk and mortar inclusions. It also contained frequent pieces of tile and bone fragments and extended 1.43m north from the church. It was up to 0.23m deep, and is likely to have been deliberately deposited there.

Below (202) is a layer of firm mid yellow brown silty clay (203), very similar to (102), which as well as containing large amounts of tile and bone fragments also contained two burials.

The first, SK204, was uncovered halfway down the trench and consisted of a skull clavicle and the uppermost tip of the left humerus, with the rest of the body extending in an easterly direction into the section. The skull was in a poor condition and was heavily cracked. It was not possible to age or sex this skeleton although it was missing all of its teeth, and the bones of the maxilla and mandible had healed over the holes. This skeleton was 0.82m below the present ground level but no grave cut or any finds associated with the skeleton could be discerned.

The second skeleton, SK205, was found 0.89m from the north end of the trench and was 0.90m below the present ground level. No grave cut was seen. This skeleton was probably that of a newborn. However, the bones were completely crushed and in a very bad condition. Fragments of skull, ribs and parts of the limbs could be distinguished. No artefacts were found in association with this burial.

In the southern end of the trench next to the buttress of the north aisle of the church a series of large stones had been placed possibly as reinforcement for the northwestern corner of the church wall. These stones were irregular in shape and size, except for one ashlar block on the western side of the sondage. It is unclear whether they were placed as part of the construction of the north aisle or at a later date as part of a repair. The fact that the western end of the north aisle has two buttresses supporting it (while the eastern side has just one), argues in favour of the western end having to be strengthened and repaired at some point. A layer of mid grey brown clay silt had been banked up over these stones prior to the build up of (203). The Medieval pottery found in (203) indicates that even if the stones were not part of the original construction of the church they are still Medieval in origin.



Plate 1: Trench 1, view from the north



Plate 2: Section 100, view from the west



Plate 3: SK103 view from the north



Plate 4: SK105 view from the east



Plate 5: Section 200, view from the east



Plate 6: Trench 2 view from the north



Plate 7: SK204, view from above facing east



Plate 8: SK205 view from above facing east



Plate 9: Stones at the base of buttress, view from northeast

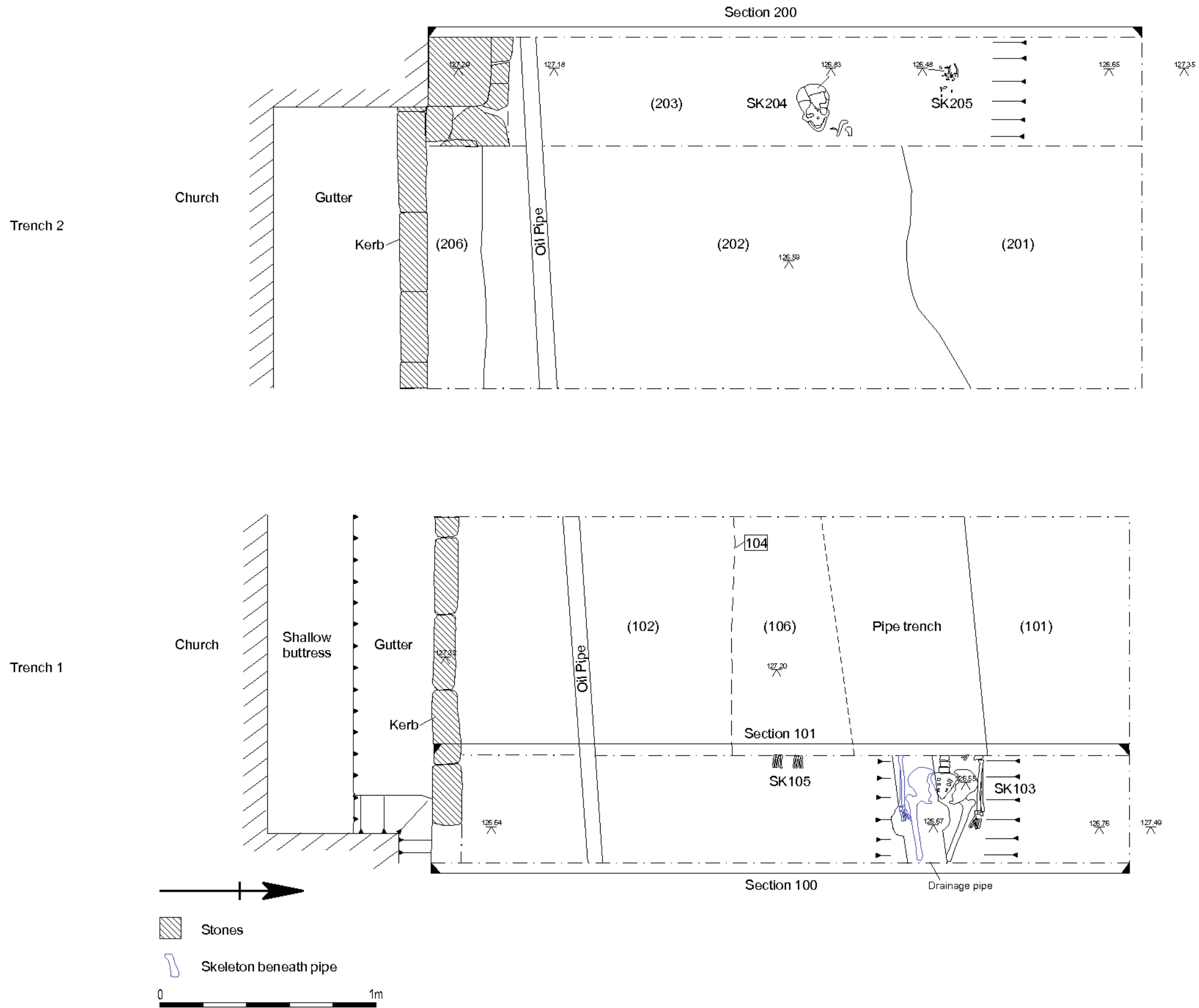


Figure 4: Trench plans (scale 1:20)

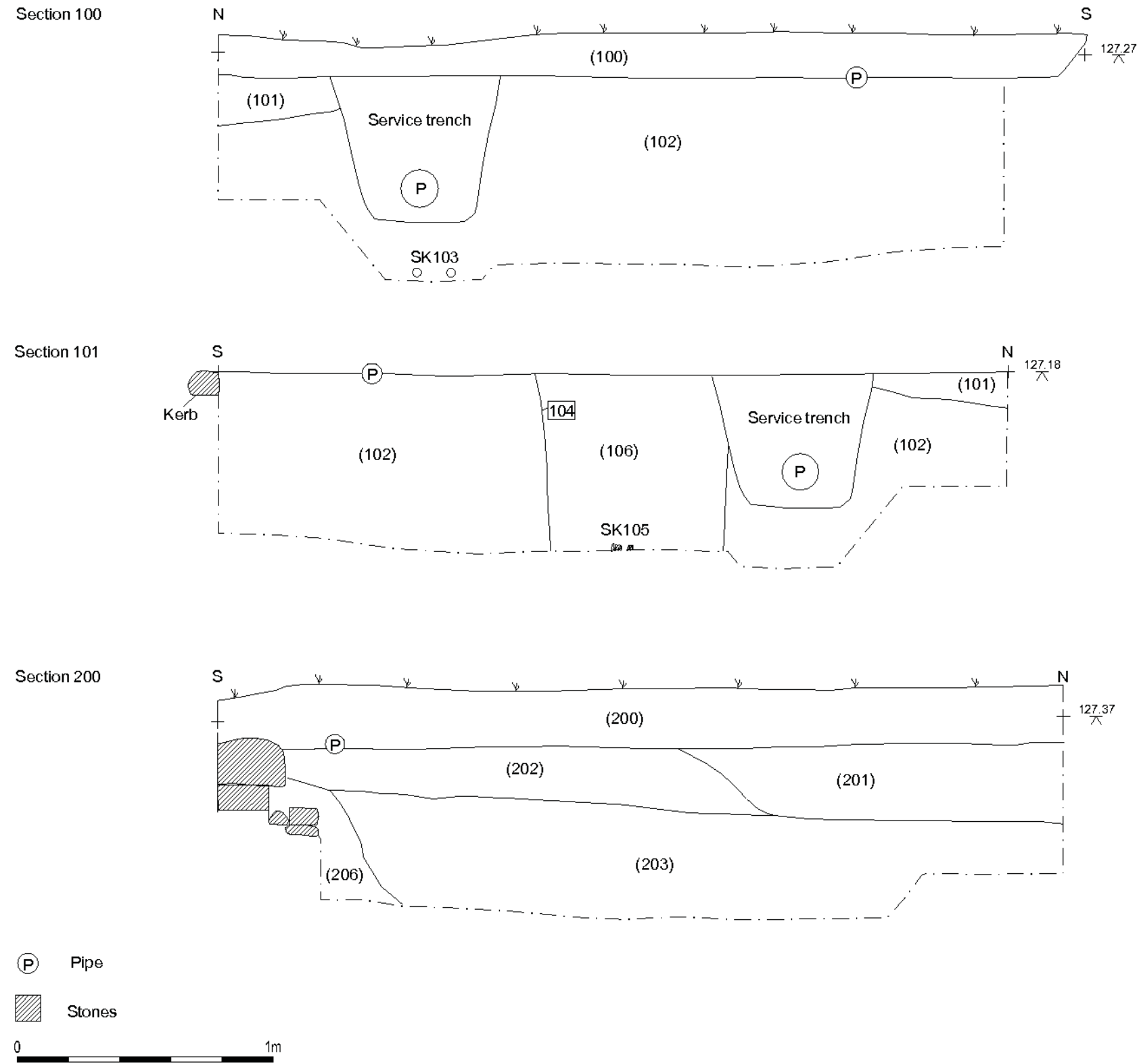


Figure 5: Sections (scale 1:20)

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The heavily disturbed ground encountered on the site is typical of any ancient churchyard, where burials have taken place over a number of centuries, and the lower limit of this disturbance was not reached.
- 5.2 Each trench contained two burials in the base of the sondages including three reasonably preserved adults and one very badly preserved infant. Although all four burials were significantly below the formation level of the new extension floor the piles used in its construction will extend deeper. It is likely that this pattern of concentrated burials will continue across the whole area of the new development and are probably going to be of a similar depth.
- 5.3 A number of large stones were deposited in the southern end of Trench 2 next to the northwestern corner of the north aisle of the church. The irregular nature of these stones indicate that they are probably not part of an earlier structure but have been placed as a reinforcement for the existing northern wall, although it is not clear whether this was part of the original structure or a later repair.
- 5.4 The clement weather, good visibility and the full cooperation of all parties indicates high confidence rating for this evaluation.

6. Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by Pamela Ward on behalf of *St. Mary's Ecumenical Church Council*. The writer is grateful to Pamela Ward for her assistance. The project was monitored by David Radford of *Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service* on behalf of the local planning authority.

The project was managed for ASC by Karin Semmelmann BA MA MIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by Ralph Brown BSc and Janice McLeish MA. The report was prepared by Ralph Brown BSc and edited by Bob Zeepvat MA MIFA.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Clients site plans
5. Site records
6. Site record drawings
7. List of photographs
8. B/W prints & negatives
9. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum.

8. References


Standards & Specifications


- EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition. English Heritage (London).
- IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.
- IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.
- Radford, D. 2007 *Design Brief for St Mary's Church North Marston* (Buckingham County Archaeology Service)
- Semmelmann K. 2008 *Project Design for an Evaluation at St. Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire* ASC/1088/NMC/1

Secondary Sources

- BGS *British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology*.
- Pevsner, N. & Williamson, E. 2000 *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (London)
- RCHME, 1913 *Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments (England): Buckingham (North)* (London)
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).
- Victoria County History: A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 4 (1927), pp. 76-80.
- URL: [http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=62538&strquery=north marston](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=62538&strquery=north%20marston).
Date accessed: 12 June 2008.

Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

Trench 1						
	Max Dimensions (m)					
	Length	3.40	Width	1.60	Depth	1.00m
	Levels					
	Trench base north			126.65m OD		
	Trench top north			127.35m OD		
	Trench base south			126.59m OD		
	Trench top south			127.29m OD		
	NGR Co-ordinates					
	SP	477706 222708		SP	477705 222712	
	Orientation			N-S		
Reason for Trench						
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: m)	Length (max: m)	Thickness (max: m)	
100	Layer	Topsoil-Clay loam friable dark grey brown	>1.60	>3.40	0.20	
101	Layer	Soft mid grey brown clay silt	>1.60	>0.75	0.20	
102	Layer	Mid yellow brown sticky silty clay 4%stones	>1.60	>3.07	0.80	
103	Skeleton	Adult, good condition, waist area, E-W supine				
104	Cut	Grave cut straight vertical sides flat base	>0.57	>0.25	0.72	
105	Skeleton	Only metatarsals found E-W, in good condition				
106	Fill	Soft mid yellow brown silty clay	>0.57	>0.25	0.72	

Trench 2						
	Max Dimensions (m)					
	Length	3.31	Width	1.60	Depth	0.90m
	Levels					
	Trench base north			126.76m OD		
	Trench top north			127.49m OD		
	Trench base south			126.64m OD		
	Trench top south			127.29m OD		
	NGR Co-ordinates					
	SP	477694 222707		SP	477695 222711	
	Orientation			N-S		
Reason for Trench						
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: m)	Length (max: m)	Thickness (max: m)	
200	Layer	Topsoil-Clay loam friable dark grey brown	>1.60	>3.31	0.20	
201	Layer	Soft mid grey brown clay silt 3% stone	>1.60	1.47	0.30	
202	Layer	Friable mid grey brown silty loam 10% stone >0.05m and frequent chalk and mortar	>1.60	1.88	0.23	
203	Layer	Mid yellow brown sticky silty clay 4% stone	>1.60	1.43	0.23	
204	Skeleton	Skull and clival exposed E-W burial				
205	Skeleton	Infant completely crushed				
206	Layer	Mid grey brown clay silt soft 2% stone	>1.60	0.45	0.45	

Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: St Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire			SITE NO/CODE:1088/NMC
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	✓	✓	Pre excavation shot of Trench 2 view from north
2	✓	✓	Pre excavation shot of Trench 2 view from south
3	✓	✓	General site shot view from northeast
4		✓	General site shot view from northeast
5		✓	General site shot view from northwest
6	✓	✓	Pre excavation shot of Trench 1 view from south
7	✓	✓	Pre excavation shot of Trench 1 view from north
8	✓	✓	Section 200 partially excavated view from east
9		✓	Section 200 partially excavated view from east
10		✓	Section 200 partially excavated view from east
11		✓	SK204 from above
12		✓	SK205 from above
13		✓	General site shot from northwest
14		✓	SK204 view from the north
15	✓	✓	Trench 2 post excavation view from the north
16		✓	Trench 2 post excavation view from the south
17	✓	✓	Section 200 view from the east
18		✓	Section 200 view from the east
19	✓	✓	SK204 view from above
20		✓	SK204 view from above
21	✓	✓	SK205 view from above
22	✓	✓	Section 100 view from the west
23		✓	Section 100 view from the west
24	✓	✓	Trench 1 view from the north
25	✓	✓	SK103 view from above
26		✓	SK103 view from north
27		✓	SK103 view from above
28		✓	SK103 view from south
29		✓	SK103 view from south
30		✓	SK105 view from the east
31		✓	SK105 view from the east
32		✓	SK105 view from the east
33		✓	SK105 view from the east
34		✓	Fe nails associated with SK105
35		✓	Stones at southern end of trench 2 view from northeast
36		✓	Stones at southern end of trench 2 view from northeast
37		✓	Close up of south end of trench 1 view from the north
38			
39			
40			

Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	St Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire		
Short Description:	In July 2008 ASC undertook an archaeological evaluation in the churchyard of St. Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire, ahead of the construction of an extension to the northern aisle of the church. Two trenches were excavated butting up against the church. Each was found to contain the deep disturbed deposits characteristic of old churchyards where burials have been continually deposited over centuries. Four burials were found, two in each trench. Although this high concentration of interments is likely to continue right across the area of the new development, the depth of the skeletons found was below the formation level of the extension floor. A number of stones at the northwestern corner of the north aisle of the church indicate that there was additional reinforcement of the church in this area. It was not clear whether this strengthening was part of the construction of the church or a later repair.		
Project Type: (indicate all that apply)	Trial Trenching		
Site status: (eg. none, SAM, Listed)	Grade I listed	Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	SMR 2098
Current land use:	Churchyard	Future work: (yes / no / unknown)	unknown
Monument type:	Church	Monument period:	Medieval
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)			
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Buckinghamshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	SP 7770 2270
Site address: (with postcode if known)	St. Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	0.4ha	Height OD: (metres)	127
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	David Radford	Project design originator:	Karin Semmelmann
Project Manager:	Karin Semmelmann	Director/Supervisor:	Ralph Brown
Sponsor / funding body:	St Mary's Ecumenical Church Council		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	14 th July 2008	End date:	22 nd July 2008
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:			
Paper:	Buckingham Museum	Site records, Project Design, Report	
Digital:	Buckingham Museum	CD	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Archaeological Evaluation: St. Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire		
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1088/NMC/2		
Author(s):	Ralph S. Brown BSc Hons		
Page nos	22	Date:	30 th July 2008