



# SS Mary and Edburga Stratton Audley Oxfordshire

**Historic Building Recording**



**June 2010**

**Client: Parochial Church Council,  
SS Mary and Edburga**

Issue No: 1  
OA Job No: 4512  
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# Church of St. Mary and St. Edburga, Stratton Audley

*Historic Building Investigation*

*Written by Deirdre Forde*

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## **Church of St. Mary and St. Edburga, Stratton Audley**

### ***Summary***

*In September 2009, Oxford Archaeology was commissioned to investigate and record features exposed at St. Mary and St. Edburga church at Stratton Audley during clearance works inside the nave. The church is a stone building featuring a chancel, clerestoried nave, north and south aisles, north porch, and west tower as well as a sanctus bell-cote above the chancel arch. It is largely a 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century structure with 15<sup>th</sup> century additions. The south wall of the south aisle features a 12<sup>th</sup> century doorway.*

*The work carried out comprised of a rapid recording of features exposed by the recent clearance works at the church and a plan to show the partial medieval mortar flooring, outline burials, font and brick edging of exposed vaults. A report was then produced including the archaeological plan and a series of photographs.*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 In September 2009, Oxford Archaeology was commissioned to investigate and record features exposed at St. Mary and St. Edburga church at Stratton Audley during clearance works inside the nave and aisles.
- 1.1.2 During works to remove the pews, parts of an old buried font was exposed at the south west corner of the nave. A medieval mortar floor surface, some possible burials and the edges of brick lined vaults were also uncovered. When the features were revealed the church contacted the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and he requested that a rapid archival record be made of the features prior to their removal or re-covering.

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

- 1.2.1 The general aim of the project was to produce for posterity an archive record of the specific features revealed by the pew-removal works.
- 1.2.2 More specific objectives were to produce an archaeological plan and photographic record of such features while exposed and to compile findings in a bound report.
- 1.2.3 To archive and to make available the results of the investigation.

### 1.3 Methodology

- 1.3.1 The voids within the floor from which the pews and timber floor had been removed were lightly brushed and the paving edges and pier bases were inspected to establish their character and subsequently photographed and planned on archivally stable permatrace.
- 1.3.2 A short written report was produced including the plan and a series of photographs. The report was not intended to include any historical research or wider recording of the church.
- 1.3.3 The site drawings photographs and photographic negatives will be labelled and deposited as an ordered archive with the Oxfordshire Museums Service.

## 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The below history of St. Mary and St. Edburga is based on the history of Stratton Audley outlined in The Victoria County History Vol. 6.
- 2.1.2 The church of St. Mary and St. Edburga is first specifically mentioned when it was granted by Gilbert Basset, Lord of the manors of Bicester and Stratton, to the Augustinian Priory of Bicester at its foundation between 1182 and 1185. The church that exists today however, although certainly replacing an earlier structure, is largely a 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century structure. The south wall of the south aisle features a disused 12<sup>th</sup> century doorway, though this may not be its original location.
- 2.1.3 The north aisle and the clustered columns which separate it from the nave date to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The remains of a blocked up lancet at the west end of the south aisle suggest that this was also added or rebuilt at some point in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but was widened in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Its arcade is of a later date than that on the north side. The east window of the north aisle was rebuilt early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and towards the end of the century, a battlement west tower was built within the west wall of the nave.



- 2.1.4 The chancel was rebuilt and the nave clerestory was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. During the course of this century, several additional windows were inserted in the aisles and the ornate battlemented porch was added.
- 2.1.5 The church was fully restored by the architect Roger Smith in 1861. The restoration cost about £800 and included the rebuilding of the chancel arch, replacement of the chancel roof, reroofing of the nave roof, removal of the chancel screen and reseating both nave and aisles.
- 2.1.6 Today, there are still early 14<sup>th</sup> century shields in the west window of the south aisle and the east window of the south aisle, and there is some medieval glass in one of the chancel windows.

### 3 DESCRIPTION

#### 3.1 Introduction and general description

- 3.1.1 The church of St. Mary and St. Edburga is a Grade I Listed building (See Appendix B for Listed Building entry). It is a stone structure consisting of a chancel, a clerestoried nave, north and south aisles, north porch and a west tower as well as a sanctus bell-cote above the chancel arch. There are two clustered piers at either side of the nave separating it from the north and south aisles. There is a large stone octagonal font in the north east of the nave and a Jacobean pulpit. The tower features a large, 20<sup>th</sup> century carved oak screen, designed by T. Lawrence (VCH Vol.6). There are various inscriptions and tablets throughout the church dating from as far back as the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 3.2 Description of cleared site

- 3.2.1 *Floor:* Prior to installation of the new floor, the pews were removed from inside the church and the floor taken up to leave voids of an approximate depth of 20 cm on average. The area uncovered is approximately 7.55m north to south, 6.80m east to west and includes the four clustered columns which separate the aisles from the nave (Plate 1). Most of the central aisle however, has been left in place (Plate 2). The ground mainly consists of a dry, dusty friable soil with areas of a harder, paler mortar indicating an earlier floor surface or sealing layer.
- 3.2.2 *Buried Font:* Next to the south east side of the north east pier is a buried stone font. It is made up of at least eight separate pieces clustered together in an elliptical shape (Plate 3) and inside were some further loose stones which appear to be pieces of the rim. This arrangement, from the outside of the rim is approximately 610mm across north west to south east and 820mm north east to south west. It is 460mm deep from the rim of the font and 600mm deep from the surface of the floor.
- 3.2.3 It is possible that it is made up of more than one font as some of the stones don't quite match each other. In fact, the largest and most ornate stone on the south west side is possibly part of a small medieval window arch (Plate 4). Around the font is an area of darker ground. This may indicate a cut but it is more likely to simply represent an area where the historic floor surface has been removed in the clearance.
- 3.2.4 *Burials:* At the west end of the opening, at either side of the central aisle and between the piers, are two dark patches in the ground indicating possible burials. Another dark area of ground can be seen immediately east of the north east pier, but this is less defined

than the aforementioned features and, as above, may indicate an area where historic floor surface has been removed..

- 3.2.5 Immediately to the east of the south east pier is an area which may be the remains of a plaster floor (Plate 5). This is characterised by a paler and rougher surface. Immediately south of this is the edge of a brick lined vault. Just three bricks appear from under the terracotta tile floor but a cut is clearly visible (Plate 6). It appears to orientated east to west.
- 3.2.6 The foundations of the piers are made up of large stones which form a 0.6m x 0.6m base (approximately) on the south side and 1m x 1m base on the north side (Plates 7 & 8). Much of these foundations have been broken away and damaged, perhaps during works to lay the modern floor.
- 3.2.7 In section, lower bricks, below the level of the mortar surface, can be seen (Plate 9 & Fig. 2, Section; fill no. 5). This may suggest that there was a lower brick floor surface at some point. A low brick floor surface can be seen in a small opening in the south west corner of the nave (Plate 10). Above this is the hard mortar surface (Fig. 2, Section; no. 1), consistent throughout much of the exposed floor. Above this is a loose, rubblely mortar fill, likely to have been laid down in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to level the floor. There are large stone inclusions as well as fragments of tile and organic material such as wood chips within this fill. In areas, at the same level as this rubblely fill, is a yellow, loose and friable lime mortar. Between these fills and the terracotta tiles is a thin layer of grey chalky lime mortar.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 The uncovering of the partial mortar flooring and the outline burials are to be expected in a church of this date and size but the occurrence of a buried font is a little more unusual and interesting. Many plain and undatable fonts are thought to be early and straight-sided and bucket-shaped tub-fonts, such as this, are thought to date as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century and earlier (Blair, 2009). The practice of burying an old font was occasionally carried out in small medieval churches when being replaced with a new one. Fonts were thought to have been ritually broken before burial to prevent their reuse for unwholesome purposes. This font however, is slightly more unusual again due to the addition of what appears to be a window arch in place of one side of the damaged rim. Fragments of the damaged font were placed inside it.
- 4.1.2 The burials within the church had no evidence of bone on the surface and any human remains within will most likely not be disturbed by the works taking place.
- 4.1.3 Apart from the font, finds from within the cleared area include a large animal bone, most likely a cow bone, six pieces of clay pipe and a piece of lead.

Deirdre Forde

June 2010

## APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Published Sources**

*Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire* Vol. 6

Blair J, *The Prehistory of English Fonts*, 2009

## APPENDIX B. LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Building Name: Church Of St Mary And St Edburga, Stratton Audley  
 District: Cherwell, Oxfordshire, OX6 9BD

LBS Number: 243712 NGR: SP6085826037  
 Grade: I Date Listed: 07 December 1966

## STRATTON AUDLEY CHURCH LANE

SP6026 (West side)  
 07/12/66

21/119 Church of St. Mary and St.  
 Edburga

## GVI

Church. C14 and C15. Restoration of 1861 by Roger Smith. Coursed limestone rubble. Chancel has a slate roof with stone coped gable, the other roofs not visible. Aisled nave, chancel, west tower, north porch. 4-window range on north. Chancel has a 3-light Perpendicular east window. 2-light Perpendicular windows to north and south have square heads, hood moulds and label stops. Diagonal buttresses. Stone parapet. North aisle has a 3-light east window with intersecting tracery; two 4-light Perpendicular windows, one restored and a lancet to right of porch. Crenellated stone parapet with gargoyles. Perpendicular stone porch has a wide moulded and chamfered archway. Bench seats. Decorated stone 4-centred arched north door has moulded and chamfered jambs. Crenellated parapet with finials. Diagonal buttresses with gargoyles. West tower of 4 stages. Pointed arched west doorway. 2-light Perpendicular window to first and bell-stages, the latter with louvres. Elsewhere lancets. Angle buttresses. Crenellated parapet with finials. South aisle has 2 entrances one with a pointed arched head, the other to right with a reused C12 doorway. Plank doors. 2-light Decorated windows to left. Two 4-light Perpendicular windows to right. Stone parapet with gargoyles. Nave has three, 2-light Perpendicular clerestory windows. C15 chancel roof has cusped struts and open tracery between the beams and braces. Nave and aisles have restored C19 roof incorporating earlier timbers. 3 bay north and south arcades. The north arcade has clustered Early English piers. The south arcade appears similar but recut rather than rebuilt in the C14. Jacobean pulpit. Medieval octagonal font. Medieval parish chest. South chapel has a Baroque monument to Sir John Burlase, d.1688. Elaborate alabaster memorial on grand scale (BOE). A reclining figure in periwig and Roman armour flanked by twisted columns and mourning women. Above and below are cherubs, drapery, swags, garlands and a cartouche on a broken segmental pediment. Alabaster cartouche memorial to Baldwin Borlase, d.1678. Strapwork surround with drapery and cherubs. Stained glass: in the east window of the north aisle, fragments of C14 glass including the arms of Ficuves of Segrave and a frontal head of Christ. Grotesque lions head of C15 in south chancel windows. Early C14 shield of Clare and family and foliage fragments in west window of south aisle. (Buildings of England: Oxfordshire: 1974, pp794-5; VCH: Oxfordshire: Vol VI, pp332-3)

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Figure 1: Site location

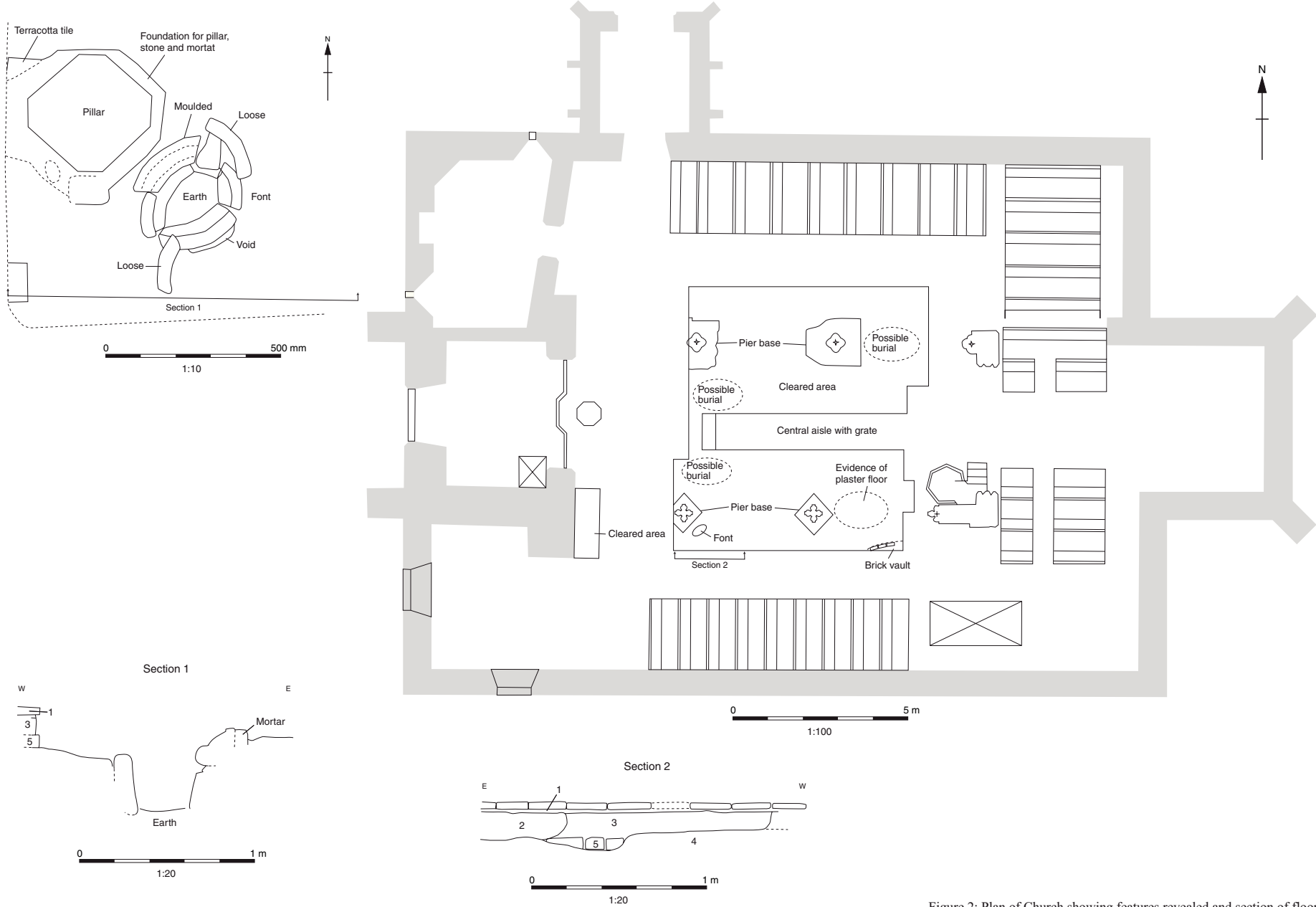


Figure 2: Plan of Church showing features revealed and section of floor



Plate 1: View of nave and south aisle

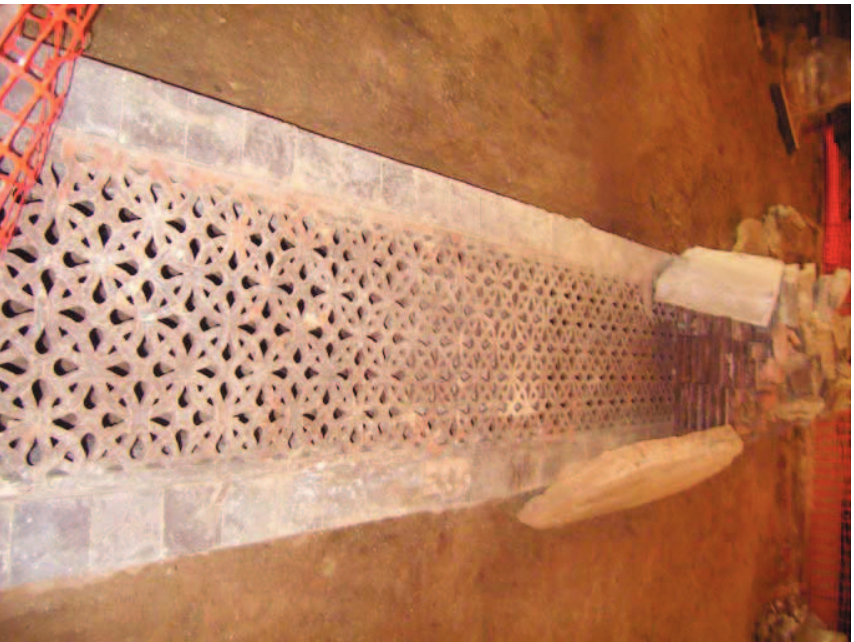


Plate 2: Central aisle of nave, facing west



Plate 3: Exposed font, facing north



Plate 4: Detail of exposed font, facing north west





Plate 5: Evidence of possible plaster flooring in south east corner of nave, facing north



Plate 6: Exposed edge of brick vault in south east corner of nave, facing south east



Plate 7: Base of south east cluster column, facing south east



Plate 8: Base of north east cluster column, facing west



Plate 9: Exposed lower level of brick next to north west column



Plate 10: Exposed area of brick in south west corner of nave, facing north



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