



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF AT TRINITY RESTAURANT,
CHAPEL STREET, OXFORDSHIRE OX26 6BD**

SP 5848 2228

By
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On behalf of

RSSI UK Ltd

June 2012

REPORT FOR	RSSI UK Ltd c/o Trinity Restaurant Chapel Street Bicester OX26 6BD
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FIELDWORK	2 nd 8 th June 2012
REPORT ISSUED	20 th June 2012
ENQUIRES TO	John Moore Heritage Services Hill View Woodperry Road Beckley Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ Tel/Fax 01865 358300 Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk
Site Code	BITR 12
JMHS Project No:	2472
Archive Location	The archive is currently held by JMHS and will be deposited with Oxford Museum Services in due course with Accession Number: 2011.181

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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground reduction for a new single storey extension to the rear of Trinity Restaurant, Chapel Street, Bicester (10/01927/F). A total of seven site visits were made intermittently over the period from 2nd to 8th June 2012. The monitored ground works involved the excavation (by hand) of the footing trenches usually to a depth of c. 0.90m from the present ground level. Grave cuts could be seen at the eastern end of the site, but the burials were not encountered. Three broken headstones were collected from this area of the site, which were probably levelled when the church went out of use and the present paving slabs laid down. At the south western corner of the site a brick built crypt was discovered and the skeleton recorded. A later second brick vaulted crypt was seen in the side of the footing trench, but the skeleton was not disturbed and left in situ. The crypts probably belonged to a married couple perhaps one of the pastors and his wife.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located at Chapel Street, Bicester (SP 5848 2228) and lies at approximately 68m above OD with the underlying geology shown as Cornbrash.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission has been granted by Cherwell District Council for the single storey extension to the rear of Trinity Restaurant, Chapel Street, Bicester (10/01927/F). Due to the possible presence of archaeological features a condition was requested requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of ground works. This is in line with PPS 5 and Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for the archaeological work. This was followed by a *Written Scheme of Investigation* which outlined the method by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Chapel Street

The site of a new development lies on the east side of Chapel Street (Fig. 1). The building concerned is within an area of some archaeological interest located immediately to the north-east of an area where Saxon archaeological deposits were recorded (PRN 16137). Excavation of three early Saxon sunken featured buildings dated to the 6th & 7th centuries were recorded along with five timber framed halls dated to the 9th – 10th centuries AD (Harding and Andrews 2002). The early Saxon buildings are the earliest settlement evidence found in Bicester. The five Saxon halls are thought to be part of a larger site with further settlement extending north and south along the eastern bank of the River Bure.



Figure 1. Site location

On the western side of Chapel Street and the River Bure was the medieval Priory founded by Gilbert Bassett around 1183 for a Prior and eleven canons. It was endowed with land and buildings around the town and other parishes, but always collected only a modest income. The history and building history of the Priory has been well summarised in Blomfield's *Deanery of Bicester, History of Bicester part II* (Blomfield 1884), *Oxfordshire Victoria County History* (V.C.H Oxon VI) and Hinton's article on *Bicester Priory* (Hinton 1968) and should be consulted for detailed background of the Priory including a translation of the account rolls. The Priory was typical of Augustinian traditions of the time, set within a precinct wall containing church, cloister, refectory, kitchens, dormitory and Prior's lodgings. None of the buildings survive above ground since the dissolution of the Priory Church. John Moore Heritage Services conducted a full scale excavation over the eastern end of the Priory Church during the summer of 2011 as part of the sites redevelopment. Twenty supine inhumations were recovered from beneath the floors. The medieval relics of St Edburg were also recovered (Riccoboni 2012 *forthcoming*) and the results will be fully published in due course. Trinity Restaurant is located within the core of the medieval settlement of Bicester close to the old priory precinct and the present causeway thought to be at least 14th century in origin.

Chapel Street developed in the post-medieval period with construction of almshouses and dwellings along both sides of the street. It was previously called Water Lane and was known to be liable to flooding. The street was densely lined with cottages, which had origins from at least the early 17th century (Riccoboni 2012 *forthcoming*). The buildings on the east side of the street (of which three still exist; No's 38-42 Chapel Street) were constructed on a raised bank of limestone Cornbrash. The dwellings would have used the River Bure for daily needs as its course runs to the rear of the properties and is still presently open, although not well flowing as it was considerably widened during the 20th century to prevent flooding. After three disastrous fires in 1718, 1724 & 1730 there was much rebuilding in the town (Rotary Club 1999). The 1724 fire destroyed the old buildings on Water Lane (now Chapel Street). 'In three hours it destroyed ten dwelling houses, besides warehouses, malt houses, stables, and out-houses, in all about 159 bays and buildings...' (Blomfield 1884). After this fire land was set aside for the Presbyterian chapel (Trinity Restaurant) and many of the other buildings on Market Place and Sheep Street were rebuilt (Dunkin 1816, 18).

On the eastern side of Chapel Street to the south of the congregational chapel (Trinity Restaurant) over what is now Saxon Court were six almshouses, very small cottages with no back exit. Water Lane (Chapel Street) was once the main road into Bicester from London before Priory Road was created when the railway arrived via the level crossing. There was a toll gate at the southern end giving admission to the town.

Background to the Congregational Church in Chapel Street, Bicester

During the Pastorate of John Troughton Jnr. the present Chapel was built. This new 'meeting house' replaced the old 'now ruinous one' on the left hand side of Sheep Street. The building of limestone rubble and chequer brick with some ashlar dressings was opened in 1729 at a total cost of £500. Originally there were 'four long upright windows with stone circular heads looking out onto the street' (Lobel 1959). There is central block with added lower wings flanking a forecourt. A five-window brick front of main range, with blue headers, on a rubble plinth has tall round-arched windows with 19th century architraves and wooden tracery. Hipped roof has boxed eaves, which

break in the centre below a small triangular pediment; only the pediment retains the deep plaster cove. Low wings have yellow headers, and the arched windows in their front gable walls have wooden "Gothic" tracery; right wing has a gable parapet; left wing returns beside main block with sash windows. The sides and rear of the main block are in rubble and there are further arched and rose windows. A drawing of the building in 1830 shows how different it was in its original form (Fig 3). There was clearly a doorway in the centre of the building, which must have been replaced by a window. The northern most window was removed and then replaced with the pedimented porch. For about eighty years the yard behind the chapel and the space in front were used as a burial ground, and was ornamented with trees (Fig. 3). The Water Lane chapel was enlarged and modernized during the 19th century. In the face of strong opposition it got it licensed for the solemnization of marriages, only a few years after it had been permitted by law to conduct marriage services in nonconformist chapels. In 1940, the church joined the Congregational Union of England and Wales, while in 1972 the Congregationalists and English Presbyterians joined together and formed the United Reform Church. The congregation was then known as the Bicester United Reform Church; until it closed in June 1978.

A History of the Dissenters in Bicester

The history of Protestant dissent in Bicester seems to go back to the reign of Elizabeth I, when trouble, apparently over doctrinal matters, broke out between the vicar and his parishioners. Order was restored, and the next record of nonconformity occurs in 1654, when the Cromwellian commissioners appointed vicar the 'godly and painful' preacher William Hall, who had been curate in Bicester for some years. After the Act of Uniformity of 1662 a secret conventicle was established in Bicester, which used to meet at midnight in a large bake house in Sheep Street, owned by Thomas Harris. Services would normally continue until the break of dawn. After the Toleration Act of 1689, Presbyterians and Independents in the country generally formed the 'Happy Union', which terminated in acrimony in 1694. In Bicester, on the contrary, the records show clearly that late into the 18th century Presbyterians and Independents continued to work together, and sometimes brought preachers of other denominations into their fellowship. The bond of union was their common aversion to the Established Church. Local opinion was uncertain how to designate the nonconformists; in 1738 and 1759 the vicar described them as Presbyterians; in 1808 he said they described themselves as Independents. John Ludd Fenner, pastor from 1771 to about 1774, was a Unitarian. As for preachers, 'they had all sorts. Calvinistic, Arminians, Arians, Socinians, Baptists, and Methodists' (Lobel 1956). In the 19th century, the church was served by Independents or Congregationalists, as they were beginning to be called locally. The chapel, however, did not tolerate the Antinomians, who seceded from it in 1812, or the Anti-paedobaptists. A study of the earliest baptismal register suggests that Bicester was a centre for Nonconformists in a wide area; children were brought from Buckingham, Tingewick (Bucks.), Fritwell, Charlton, and other villages. In spite of a decline after Troughton's death in 1739 the church became in time the founder of other congregations (Hollis 1956).

Pastors

Samuel Park (1739-c. 1766) was 'gay and light in his practices, fond of convivial company', David Davis (1768-71) was 'a slave to his ale and pipe', and finally absconded with his debts unpaid. Ferguson collected some £200 towards the upkeep of the chapel, and increased its effective membership from about 27 to 70. He claimed

to have added 111 new members, but some emigrated and some were expelled as unsatisfactory. Under the year 1860, for example, he notes: 'Jessie Carter gone back to sin'. He was also active in good works in Bicester and the surrounding villages, and founded a missionary and other societies, libraries, Sunday and evening schools, and a clothing club. His wife kept a young ladies' boarding-school. Such an energetic crusader against the 'fearful and blasting immorality of the town and neighbourhood' - his own description to a select committee of the House of Commons - was bound to meet with opposition. He was consequently obliged to leave Bicester temporarily. After his return, though he found some of his 'crew very unmanageable', he stayed until 1860. Another important pastor of the 19th century was W. H. Dickenson (1864-74 and 1887-8). His ministry was especially notable for its Good Friday anniversary gatherings, for good relations with the Anglicans, and for the building of a schoolroom and the restoration of the chapel building. T. H. Norton (1899-1902), who abandoned his wife for the wife of one of his deacons, caused a scandal from which the church did not fully recover until the stable ministry of Thomas Smith (1915-25). Later, there was another set-back when the church was without a regular minister for about eight years, a period which ended with the part-time appointment in 1952 of the Revd. S. G. Burden, who was also pastor of Launton. The congregation fluctuated both in numbers and influence during the centuries.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

2.1 Project Objectives

This report sets out to fulfil these highlighted objectives along with the following aims stated in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2011), which were to;

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

- to record any evidence of activity relating to the Saxon settlement in the area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994) and John Moore Heritage Services *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2011).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during all ground reduction connected to the new extension. All ground reduction was achieved using hand picks, shovels and wheelbarrows.

A journal, recorded on specially designed record sheets, was maintained which detailed times and durations of site visits as well as notes on areas monitored by the

archaeologist. Deposits (overburden) were recorded on context recording sheets. A general photographic record of the work was kept and will form of the part site archive to be submitted to the Oxfordshire County Museum.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results (Fig 2)

Individual context numbers were assigned on site to deposits encountered during the ground reduction. Context numbers in () indicate deposits of material or walls. Numbers without any brackets are cuts.

General stratigraphic sequence

The earliest encountered deposit was the natural Cornbrash (102). Overlying the natural was *c.* 0.60m thick heterogeneous dark greyish brown silty clay (101) with frequent tile and brick fragments alongside post-medieval pottery sherds. The latest layer was the concrete with paving slabs (100) (Fig 2; Section 2).

Discrete Features

A posthole 104 was recorded at the northern end of the site 0.40m in length and 0.10m depth (minimum depth as feature not bottomed) (Figure 2; Section 1). It had sharp concave sides and was filled by friable dark greyish brown silty clay with one speck of post-medieval glass (103).

Grave cuts

A sub rectangular shaped feature 106 was observed to the south of feature 104. It had sharp concave sides but was not bottomed due to the limitations within the narrow trench and the impact levels of the new footings. It was filled by dark brownish grey silty clay with no finds (105).

Two further probable grave cuts 115 & 117 were seen to the south along the eastern most trench. Although these grave cuts were observed they were not investigated further due to the depths of the new trench. Both cuts were a very similar width of *c.* 0.50m and probably represent the remains of the western (feet end) of two graves. The fills of the cuts also were both very similar dark greyish brown silty clay; (114) & (116) respectively.

At the south-western end of the new extension was a red brick crypt 108 in construction cut [109] was encountered measuring *c.* 2.2m in length and *c.* 1m wide on a north-south orientation (Fig 6). Within the crypt was a skeleton (SK1) in supine position, but had been disturbed after internment probably by rodents. The skeleton was contained in a highly decorated wooden coffin with large iron handles (110). The crypt was sealed by a large thick cut stone slab in good condition except for part of the centre of the stone slab that had collapsed into the void of the crypt on top of the skeleton.

A second crypt (111) was discovered above and cutting through crypt 108 seen in the side of the footing trench; cut [118]. This was constructed of frogged red bricks with a domed vaulted ceiling. The crypt was covered with a *c.* 0.40m thick deposit of dark

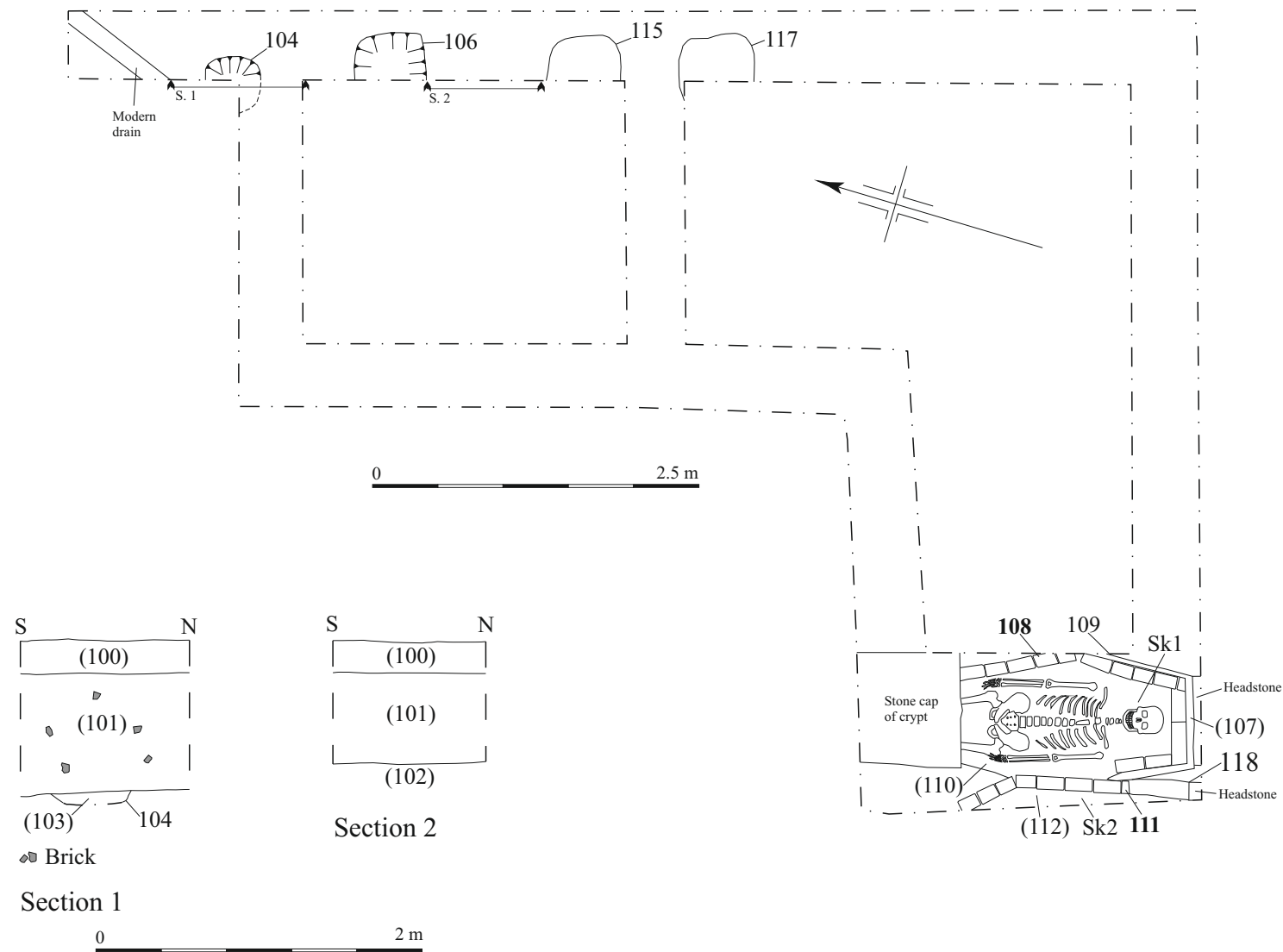


Figure 2. Plan and sections

greyish brown silty clay (113). There was a skeleton inside the crypt (112), which was not disturbed and left *in situ*.

Both of the crypts had head stones up against the southern boundary wall of the site but were cut off in half when the paving was laid. Therefore the information of the deceased was lost.

4.4 Reliability of Results

The watching brief was carried out in fair conditions with good co-operation from the contractor carrying out the groundworks.

5 FINDS

5.1 The Human Remains

The skeleton in crypt 108 looked like they belonged to a male of average height although no detailed analysis was undertaken.

5.1.1 Pottery (*By D. Gilbert*)

A single sherd of pottery was seen in context (101). This was examined but not retained. It was a sherd of Red earthenware of c. 1550+ - Oxfordshire County type-series fabric code OXDR (Mellor 1984; 1994).

This sherd displayed a dark brown glaze on both internal and external surfaces that is indicative of a later date within the fabric types range c. 19th century.

5.1.2 The Ceramic Building Material

A frogged brick was collected from crypt 112 for dating of late 19th early 20th century style. The brick measuring 220mm x 120mm was retrieved but was not retained. Other brick fragments were recovered from layer (101) but were not retained and were of a late post-medieval date.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief in the grounds of Trinity Restaurant (formerly the congregational chapel called the Bicester United Reform Church) was useful in determining the stratigraphic sequence of the site and the location of some of the burials and brick built crypts. No evidence of any Saxon settlement was discovered which was thought to extend into the site from the adjacent site uncovered in 1999 (Harding & Andrews 2000), although the trenches were very narrow making investigation impractical for excavation of features. In addition, the natural ground level was not always achieved in the trenches meaning Saxon remains could remain

buried across the area but are preserved beneath the new concrete trenches. No evidence of any earlier medieval buildings or the warehouses which were destroyed by fire in 1724 survived on the site. When the site was cleared and levelled in preparation for the chapel it is likely that these structures were comprehensively demolished and levelled into the heterogeneous deposit (101) seen across the site, which was later used for the burial ground. This would explain the loose friable quality of this soil layer and the mixed finds within it.

Figure 3; the congregational chapel before the later additions in its original form 1830



Fig 4; Inside the chapel looking south c. 1900

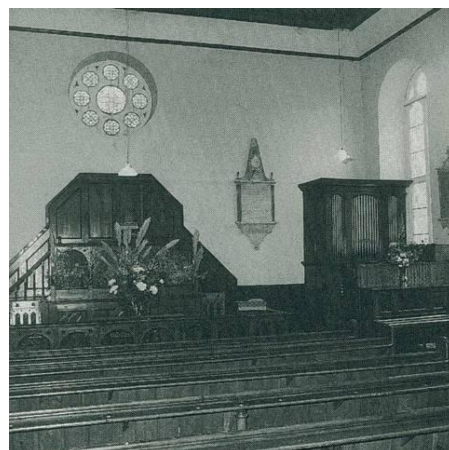


Fig 5; an early photograph of the congregational church from 1880 showing the addition of the two later wings and altered frontage



The bricks used in the construction of crypt 108 correspond closely to the size of bricks generally produced in the latter half of the 18th & 19th centuries. The bricks used in the second later crypt 112 were frogged suggesting they were factory made and of late 19th or 20th century date. We know the chapel was used for burials during the first eighty years of its use after which the cemetery presumably became full and people were buried at the town cemetery. The brick crypts would certainly prove that burial for some important wealthy worshipers or more likely the pastors was still taking place into the early 20th century. As crypt 112 was later and immediately adjacent to crypt 108 it would be likely that this is the married partner of the deceased.

The grave headstones were tight against the southern boundary wall of the site with the head at the southern end. Shown on the drawing of 1830 (Fig 3) are two gravestones tight against the southern wall of the church (with a footstone). These headstones suggest two further crypts against this wall of the church also aligned north-south but presumably with the head at the northern end of the grave. The north-south alignment of burial is common when the east-west position is not practicable. This would have probably been the case here as more burials facing north-south could fit in the limited space available around the southern side of the chapel. It seems unusual that the headstones against the church wall on the drawing are the northern end and the discovered crypts have headstones at the southern end. This may be an inaccuracy in the drawing of 1830 or more likely as the church was non-conformist, alignment of burial was not considered to be important. From the drawing (Fig. 3) we can see that the graves in the front of the church building (western side) are orientated on a more standard east-west direction, as were the grave cuts tentatively seen during the excavations on the eastern side of the church (Fig. 2; Cuts 106; 115 & 117).

Although within a very narrow trench the grave cuts could be seen but excavations were not deep enough to locate the feet, which were presumably at this end of the grave, although the drawing from 1830 shows the headstone at the eastern end, again perhaps an act of non-conformity.

The later photograph (Fig 5) shows the building in its present day form with the altered frontage. It would seem that the circular window above the previous central doorway was swapped with the window where the porch is now located.

A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved with good co-operation from the on-site contractors.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are extended to the directors of RSSI UK Ltd for commissioning JMHS to undertake the work and to Rob Davies for all his help in setting up the project. Additional thanks go to the on-site contractors who were very helpful throughout the ground works and displayed a healthy interest in the church building and great respect for the discovered skeleton.

Many thanks indeed to Gill King and Peter Chievers of the Bicester Local History Society for supplying invaluable information on the church building and references for me to study and think about. Your help and enthusiasm has been inspiring.

8 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services.

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Figure 6; Showing crypt 108



Table 1; Context Summary

Context	Type	Description	Width (m)	Length (m)	Depth (m)	Finds	Date
100	Deposit	Concrete	Tr.	Tr.	0.20	None	Modern
101	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay	Tr.	Tr.	0.60	Brick, pottery, clay pipe- not retained	Post-medieval
102	Deposit	Natural Cornbrash	Tr.	Tr.	n/a	None	Jurassic
103	Deposit	Fill of 104	0.40	0.40	0.10 (min)	Glass- not retained	Modern
104	Cut	Posthole	0.40	0.40	0.10	n/a	Modern
105	Deposit	Fill of 106	0.40 (min)	0.40 (min)	0.10 (min)	None	Unknown
106	Cut	Grave cut	0.40 (min)	0.40 (min)	0.10 (min)	None	Unknown
107	Deposit	Fill of 109	0.05	/	/	None	Post-medieval

Context	Type	Description	Width (m)	Length (m)	Depth (m)	Findings	Date
108	Masonry	Red brick crypt	0.45-0.65	c. 1.8 - 2	0.40 void	Brick	Post-medieval
109	Cut	Construction cut of 108	0.45-0.65	c. 1.8-2	0.40 void	n/a	Post-medieval
110	Deposit	Friable dark brownish grey silty clay which contained skeleton 1	0.45-0.65	c. 1.8 - 2	0.10	Wooden coffin with iron fittings	Post-medieval
111	Masonry	Red brick crypt	0.65	2	0.50 void	Brick-frogged	Post medieval
112	Deposit	Fill within crypt 111 contained Skeleton 2	0.65	2	0.50 void	none	Post-medieval /modern
113	Deposit	Deposit above crypt 112	unknown	unknown	0.30	None	Modern?
114	Deposit	Fill of grave cut 115	0.50	0.50 (min)	unknown	None	Post-medieval?
115	Cut	Grave cut	0.50	0.50 (min)	unknown	None	Post-medieval?
116	Deposit	Fill of grave cut 117	0.50	0.50 (min)	unknown	None	Post-medieval?
117	Cut	Grave cut	0.50	0.50 (min)	unknown	None	Post-medieval?
118	Cut	Construction cut for crypt 111	0.65	2	0.50 void	n/a	Post-medieval/modern

HER Summary Sheet

Site Name: Trinity Restaurant, Bicester, Oxfordshire	
Site Address: Trinity Restaurant, Chapel Street, Bicester, Oxfordshire	
Summary: <i>A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground reduction for a new single storey extension to the rear of Trinity Restaurant, Chapel Street, Bicester (10/01927/F). A total of seven site visits were made intermittently over the period from 2nd to 8th June 2012. The monitored ground works involved the excavation (by hand) of the footing trenches usually to a depth of c. 0.90m from the present ground level. Grave cuts could be seen at the eastern end of the site, but the skeletons were not encountered. Three broken headstones were collected from this area of the site, which were probably levelled when the church went out of use and the paving slabs laid down. At the south western corner of the site a brick built crypt was discovered and the skeleton removed. A later second brick vaulted crypt was seen in the side of the footing trench, but the skeleton was not disturbed and left insitu. The removed skeleton was reburied. The crypts probably belonged to a married couple perhaps one of the pastors and his wife.</i>	
District/Unitary: Cherwell	Parish: Bicester
Period(s): Post-medieval	
NGR (centre of site: 8 figures): SP 5848 2228	
Type of archaeological work Watching Brief	
Date of Recording 2 nd – 8 th June 2012	
Unit undertaking recording: JMHS	
Project Officer: Paul Riccoboni	
Geology: Cornbrash	
Title and author of accompanying report: An Archaeological Watching Brief at the Trinity Restaurant, Chapel Street, Bicester, Oxfordshire. Prepared by Paul Riccoboni BA (Hons) Arch AIFA	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate) Post-medieval crypts x 2 Grave cuts Headstones (not retained)	
Location of archive/finds:	
Contact at Unit: : Paul Riccoboni info@jmheritageservices.co.uk	Date: 14 th June 2012