



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**St MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH,**

**WOODSTOCK, OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SP 44386 16716**

*On behalf of*

*JBKS Architects*

**AUGUST 2017**

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**REPORT ISSUED** 25 August 2017

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**JMHS Project No:** 3758  
**Site Code:** WSSMM 16  
**Archive Location** The archive currently is maintained by John Moore  
Heritage Services and will be transferred to the  
Oxfordshire County Museums Service with accession  
number OXCMS:2016.13



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## **Summary**

*This document represents the results of an investigation of the potential for archaeological remains at St Mary Magdalene Church, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 44386 16716). Various building works were carried out inside and outside the building in order to install services. Three Test-Pits were excavated in the northern courtyard of the Church and one of them revealed a vault crypt that was filled with a deposit. The deposit was not excavated but on the surface, pottery was found that dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No human bones were recovered from this deposit. Three trenches were dug inside of the Church. In one of the trenches located in the threshold of the famous Norman doorway, an alignment of two sandstone blocks was recorded that have been interpreted as the medieval wall foundations of the south aisle which was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

St Mary Magdalene Church is located south of Park Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 44386 16716). The site lies between 95m and 97.5m above OD. The underlying geology is Forest Marble Formation limestone according to the British Geological Survey map.

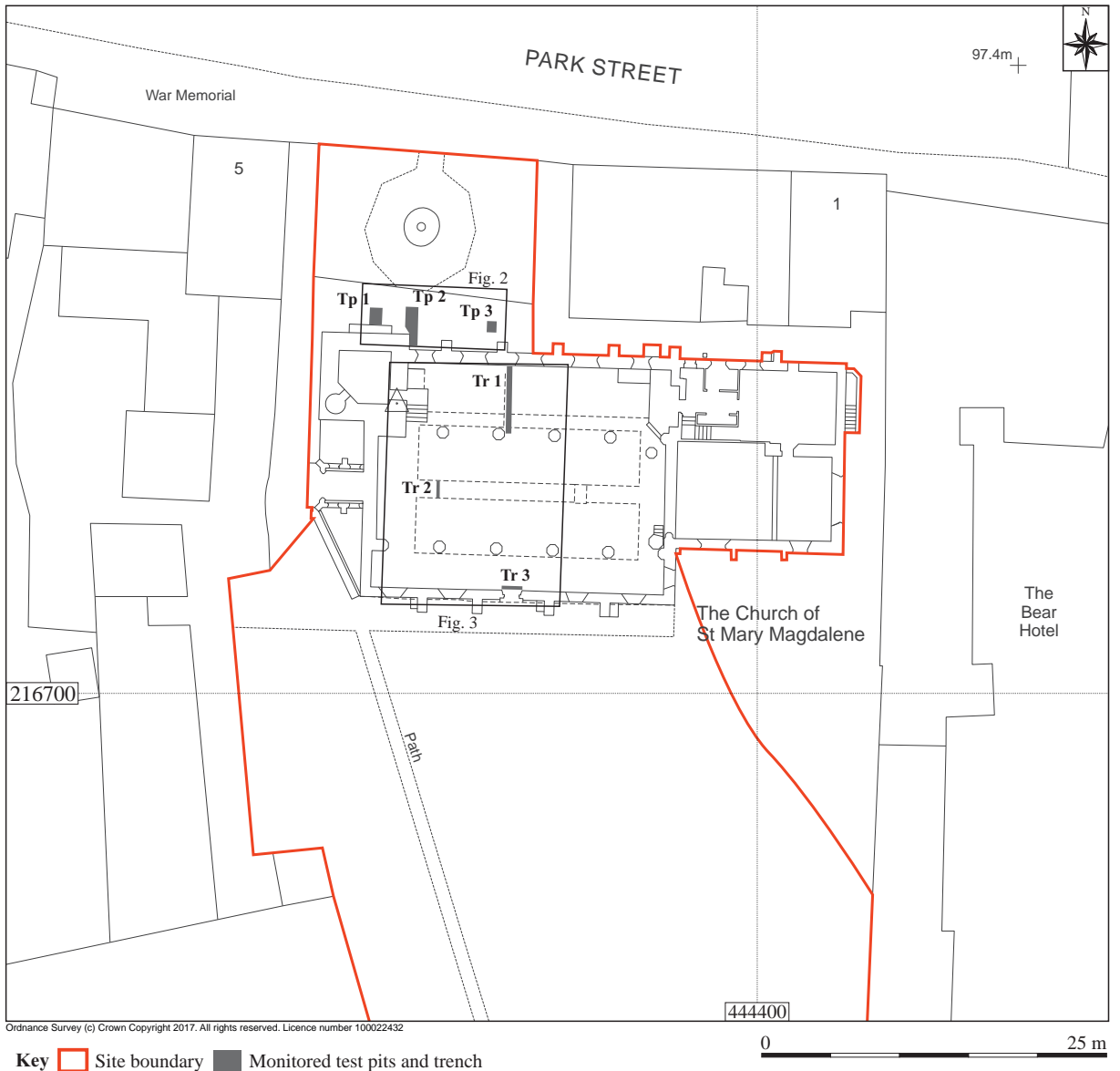
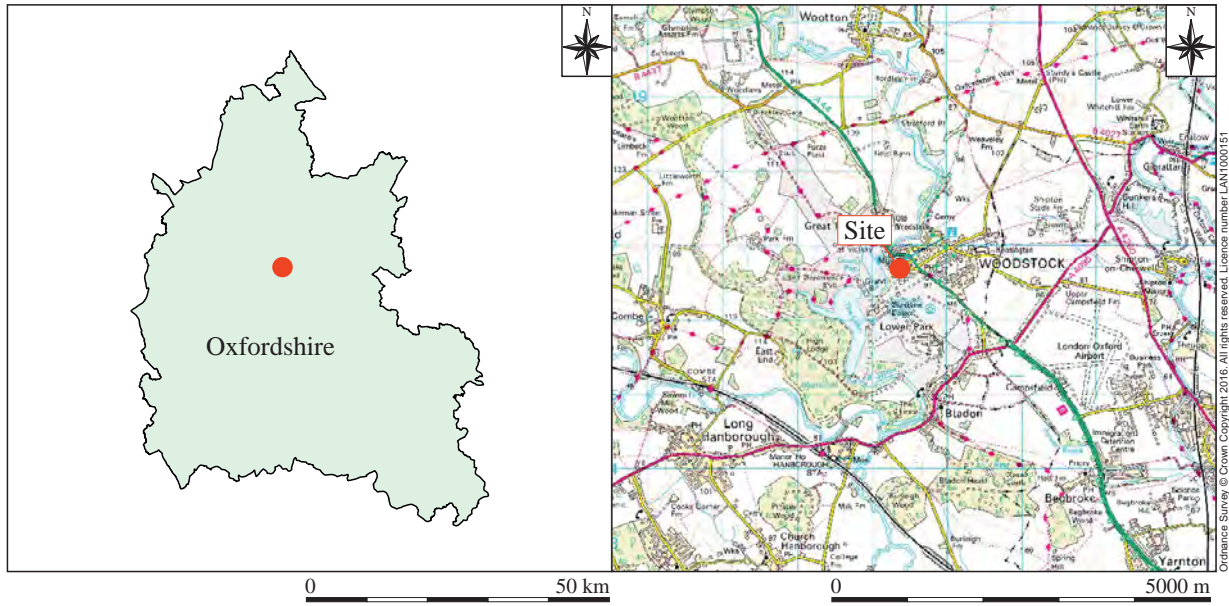
### **1.2 Planning Background**

Various works were to be carried out in St Mary Magdalene Church, relating to the installation of electric and heating and water pipes. Pits and trenches were also excavated outside the church in order to place these services for the church. The works required the supervision by an archaeologist.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

St Mary Magdalene Church is a grade II listed building (n<sup>o</sup>1262223), whose history can be traced back to King Henry II. Although the church was considerably altered in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, some more ancient parts are still preserved, especially in the south aisle. The most antique part of the church is the Norman south entrance with two continuous orders of zigzags divided by roll moulding that dates back to the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. The two windows to the east, with plate tracery and rich internal mouldings, are mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the Victorian remodelling, some 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century carved capitals were kept to adorn the south pillars of the nave. From the same date, a stone font with a gothic pattern also remains beside the west entrance. The porch itself was erected one century later while the church tower is an even more recent addition, dating back to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Test pits excavated at the church in 2016 revealed a mortar surface that may have been the setting for a tiled floor but no archaeologically significant deposits or features were identified (JMHS 2016).



Key  Site boundary  Monitored test pits and trench

Figure 1: Site location with archaeological interventions

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The aims of the investigation were to record any earlier floors or burials of any type, or any other archaeological remains within or above the proposed impact horizon for the new services.

## **3 STRATEGY**

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of all groundwork associated with the development that could potentially impact archaeological remains, including excavation for new services and test pits. Where archaeological horizons were encountered they were cleaned by hand and excavated appropriately. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was also produced.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

The resultant spoil from the works was visually scanned, especially for finds relating to the medieval period and for human remains. The walls and vault of the crypt found were visually examined for any possible engraving made on them

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate cuts, numbers in ( ) show features, fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features.

## **4 RESULTS**

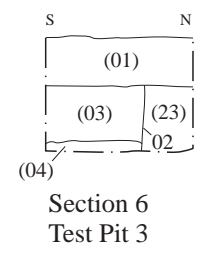
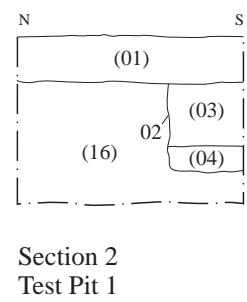
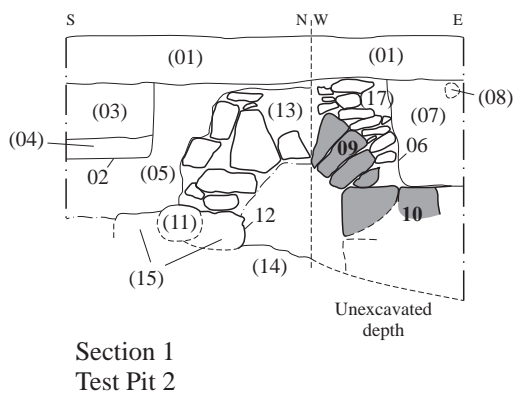
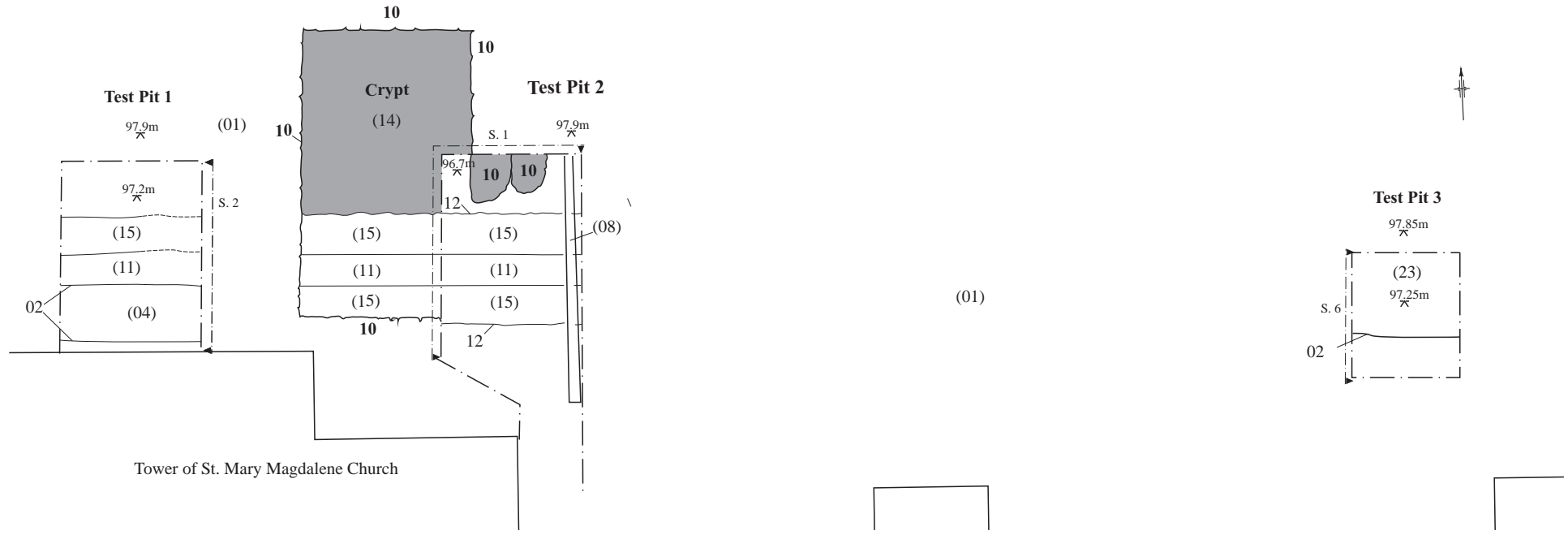
### **4.1 Test Pits in the northern courtyard of the Church**

The test-pits for the services (Figure 2) were dug in the northern area between the War Memorial and St Mary Magdalene Church. The three test pits were excavated by hand. The dimensions were:

- TP 1: 1.20x 0.90x 0.7m
- TP 2: 1.40x 0.90x 1m
- TP 3: 0.8x 0.7x 0.6m

In addition, a narrow trench of 0.5m wide was dug to connect the services installed in Test Pit 2 to the interior of the Church. This narrow trench ran from TP2 to the south.

Two of the three test pits were devoid of any archaeological evidence. These are Test Pit 1 and Test Pit 3. The deposits in both cases were quite disturbed by a cut 02 - a service trench that was dug at some point during the 1980s or 1990s in order to place services in the northern area of the Church. For both test pits, the depth did not exceed 0.7m. In Test Pit 3, Cut 02 was excavated through a mid grey brown clayey subsoil



Key  Archaeological features

Figure 2: Test Pits outside the church with sections and crypt



(23) (Fig 2, Section 6; Plate 2). In TP 1, Cut 02 was cut through a disturbed layer of mid grey brown clay and limestone backfilling and made ground (16). This deposit overlay concrete (15) which was the setting for a ceramic water pipe (11). These features were only partially revealed in plan and not visible in section (Fig 2, Section 3; Plate 1). The uppermost layer in both test pits was a 0.25m thick deposit of path gravels and trampled ground (01).



**Plate 1: Test Pit 1.**



**Plate 2: Test Pit 3.**

The excavation of TP2 was dug deeper than the other two test pits, at a depth of 0.8m, which revealed archaeology. A trench that ran from TP2 to the south was 0.15m deep and showed the foundations of the tower that was built by Townesend and John Churchill of Woodstock in 1784-6 (Baggs et al. 1990).



**Plate 3: Foundations of Church Tower.**

The foundations were constructed with the same limestone that we find in the tower, although the foundation stones were roughly hewn in comparison (Plate 3).

During the excavation of TP2 a hole in the ground became clearly visible of approximately 0.4m in diameter. This allowed access to the interior of a crypt (Plates 4, 5 and 6). An archaeologist was not present during the excavation of the test pit and



the situation when we were present was the one visible in Plate 4. Once it was recorded photographically, it was cleaned archaeologically.

The crypt, **10**, is located 0.60m deep beneath the northern churchyard ground. It has a chamber of 1.85m in length and 1.10m in width. The chamber had a vault, **09** that lay on the west and the east chamber walls and it is attached to the northern wall. The length of the vault arch is 0.20m (Fig.2 Plan and Section 1; Plate 7). Part of the southern wall was possible to visualize when the interior of the crypt was recorded.



**Plate 4: Situation of TP2 before being cleaned.**

The cavity of the vault was filled by deposit (14), a very soft mid-brown clayey silt deposit with inclusions of roughly hewn sandstone fragments of medium size (plate 8). Potsherds were found on surface, one fragment of a pipe made of clay and one small bone fragment. The pottery was collected and the bone, possibly an animal bone, was left inside the crypt. Some of the pottery was stuck into the walls of the crypt. The deposit (14) was thicker in the central part of the crypt and decreased in thickness into the north area of the chamber. In this area the distance between the roof and the fill (14) was 0.9m.

Overlying the crypt vault **09**, and visible in the northern profile of TP2, was deposit 17 (Fig. 2, Section 1; Plate 6). The deposit was a 0.55m thick light brown yellowish clayey silt. The deposit contained the same sandstone material as the crypt vault and may have been deposited close in time to when the build of the vault was completed.



**Plate 5: Western profile of TP2 (S.01)**

The W, E and S walls of the crypt were partly demolished by the service trench 12. This cut was probably more than 0.7m wide (Fig. 2, Plan and Section 1; Plate 5). It was created to install the ceramic pipe (11). This pipe was set in concrete (15) and was also observed in Test Pit 1 (Fig. 2). This type of clay pipe was in use in Britain until the 1960s, so it was placed some time before this date.

Overlying this pipe in TP2 was a backfill (13), a light brown yellowish clayey silt containing a good deal of hewn sandstone fragments of fine and medium size and rare pieces of modern concrete. These fragments of hewn sandstone are similar to the ones that we can find in the crypt vault **09**. Deposit (13) was overlaid by deposit (05) a mid-brown sandy clay deposit with lumps of green clay. This deposit was identified as made ground and backfilling and was greater than 0.65m thick. The ground in section appeared very disturbed and it was not possible to identify any cuts or differentiate these backfills from any surviving subsoil deposits (Fig. 2, Plan and Section 1; Plate 5).

In the northern profile of TP2, (Fig. 2, Section 1; Plate 6), we can see service trench 06. This service trench was 0.55m deep and cut backfill (17). It contained a gas pipe (08) and was backfilled by a mid brown clayey sand (07). Service trench 06 was at least 0.4m wide and ran from the North towards the church. The service trench was probably dug at some point during the 1980s or 1990s.



**Plate 6: Northern profile of TP2 (S01).**

The backfill and made ground (05) was cut by service trench 02. This was 0.4m deep and at least 0.45m wide. It ran parallel to St Mary Magdalene Church and extended into TP1 and TP3. It had two fills a lower fill of yellow brown sand (04) and an upper fill of mid brown sandy clay (03). The service trench was also probably dug at some point during the 1980s or 1990s.

As in the other two Test Pits, the excavation of TP2 (Fig. 2, Section 1; Plate 5) showed a top layer (01) of trampled soil and pathway gravels of 0.25m thick.



**Plate 7: Vault 09 and northern wall 10.  
Interior of the crypt**



**Plate 8: Northern wall 10 and fill (14).**

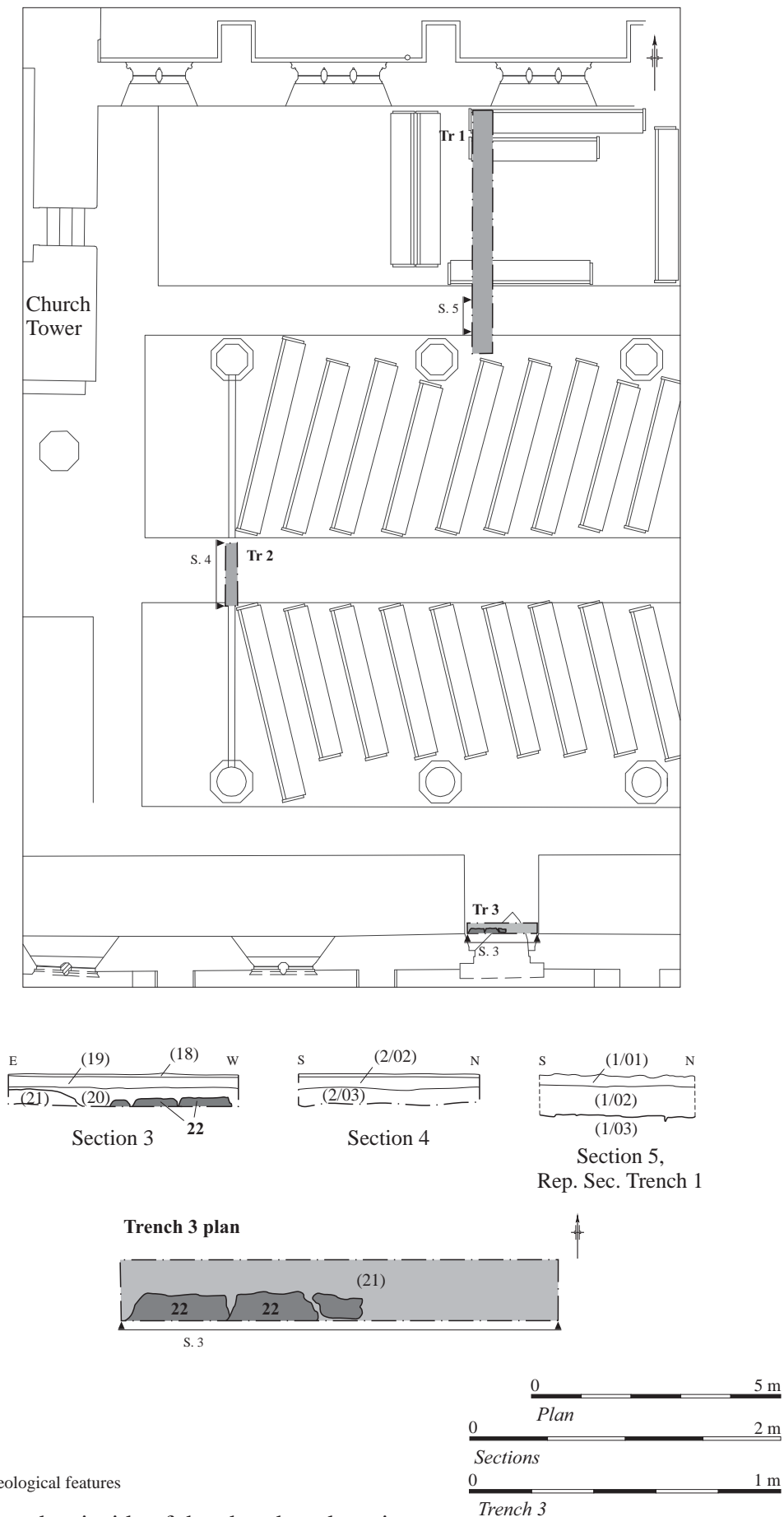


Figure 3: Trenches inside of the church and sections

## 4.2 Trenches inside of the Church

Three service trenches (Figure 3) were excavated inside of the Church for the placing a water pipeline. The dimensions were:

1. Trench 1: 4.25x0.25x0.25m
2. Trench 2: 1.10x0.20x 0.20m
3. Trench 3: 1.40x0.20x0.20m

In all the three trenches contractors had to use heavy duty drills to pierce through top layers. Subsequent deposits were removed using a mattock, shovel and trowel. Trench 1 was situated in the north aisle of the church, running for 4.25m from the south to the north and into the northern wall (Fig. 3, Section 5: Plate 9) It was 0.26m deep and a concrete layer (1/01) was found of 0.06m thickness. Below it a layer 0.20m thick of crushed concrete was encountered. Underneath this deposit lay another layer of concrete (1/03).



**Plate 9: Trench 1.**



**Plate 10: Section Trench 2.**

Trench 2 was located right in the middle of the nave, in the southern part of the Church, between the entrance bay and the next bay (Fig.3, Section 4; Plate 10). The floor in this area consisted of tiles (2/01) 0.02m deep. Underlying this was a layer of concrete (2/02), 0.06m thick. Below the concrete was a levelling layer (2/03), 0.10m deep, a mid-grey sand deposit with a moderate number of inclusions of fine angular fragments of limestone. The trench was devoid of any archaeological remains.

Trench 3 was undoubtedly the most interesting trench from an archaeological point of view. It was located in the south aisle of the church, immediately before the threshold of the doorway (Fig. 3, Trench 3 Plan, Section 3; Plate 11). Again in this trench a tiled floor was found (18), 0.02 m deep and beneath it the same layer of concrete (19). This was 0.06m thick and was recorded in the other two trenches. The concrete overlaid what was possibly a levelling layer (20), a mid-yellow brownish sand deposit with inclusions of fine/medium sub-angular fragments of limestone. Below this layer a

dark yellow-greenish deposit of clay (21) was encountered, with no finds in it. This deposit appeared in the western part of the trench and it was more than 0.08m thick. It was not possible to finish excavating it due to the constrained width of the trench. In the eastern part of the trench, what was interpreted to be the foundations of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century church were discovered. At 0.14m below the current floor (22), two sandstone blocks of medium size were identified (Fig 3, Trench 3 Plan and Section 3; Plate 11) . These sandstone blocks had an average size of 0.25m and they were roughly hewn. The bonding material was a type of clayey sand mortar of low quality. The two blocks were facing the North, showed an East-West orientation and were parallel to the Norman 12<sup>th</sup>-century southern doorway (Plate 12).



**Plate 11: Section Trench 3.**



**Plate 12. Norman south entrance**

### 4.3 Reliability of Results

The reliability of results was considered to be good. Good cooperation from the ground workers and site manager ensured sufficient time to investigate and record the archaeological deposits to the appropriate standards.

## 5 FINDS

### 5.1. POTTERY *by Stephanie N. Duensing*

The pottery assemblage comprised 13 sherds with a total weight of 109.5g.

**PMR: Red Earthenware**, 1580 – 1800. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such pottery was first made in the late 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. 3 sherds, 78.5g.

**SWSG: White salt-glazed stoneware**, 1720 – 1770. Fine light grey bodied stoneware, glazing method results in a characteristic ‘orange rind’ dimpled effect. Most common decoration is incised bands or other designs. Most commonly seen in tea and table wares. 4 sherds, 20g.

**PMR SLIP: Slipped red ware**, 1800 – 1900. Fine sandy red earthenware, with a thin reddish brown slip rather than a glaze. 1 sherd, 3.5g.

**CREA: Creamware**, 1740-1830. Fine white bodied earthenware with distinctive yellowish ting to the glaze. Common for tea and table wares. 4 sherds, 8.5g.

**ENGS: English stoneware**, 1700 – 1900. This category includes a group of stoneware fabrics, of nineteenth-century date, which could not be assigned to specific British potteries. 2 sherds, 7.2g.

Context	Fabric CODE	Fabric	Form	Décor	Sher count	EVEs	ED	LD	Comments
03	SWSG	White Saltglazed Stoneware	Base/teabowl	Incised, annular banding	1	8%	1720	1770	
03	PMR SLIP	Red body earthen ware	Vessel	none	1	8%	1800	1900	red slip
05	PMR	Red earthen ware lead glazed	Storage bowl	Glazed	1	8%	1580	1900	brown lead glaze
05	PMR	Red earthen ware lead glazed	Vessel	Glazed	1	8%	1600	1900	brown lead glaze
014	CREA	Creamware	Plate rim	Glazed	2	15%	1740	1830	
014	CREA	Creamware	Plate body	Glazed	2	15%	1740	1830	
014	SWSG	White Saltglazed Stoneware	Cup rim	Glazed	1	8%	1720	1770	incised annular rim
014	SWSG	White Saltglazed Stoneware	Vessel	Glazed	1	8%	1720	1770	grey body
014	ENGS	English stoneware	Cup rim	Glazed, annular banding	1	8%	1700	1900	brown and blue annular glaze at rim
014	ENGS	English stoneware	Cup	Glazed, annular banding	1	8%	1700	1900	light and dark brown annular glaze
014	PIPE	White Terra Cotta	Tobacco pipe Stem	none	1	8%	1700	1800	slightly off centre hole

Table 1. Pottery description and analysis



The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is fairly typical of sites in the region. The assemblage was post-medieval in date. Overall the range of pottery types present indicates that there was domestic activity at the site during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wares reflect that of a middle social status.

The assemblage also contained one pipe stem with an off-centre bore hole of narrow diameter, indicating a late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century date of manufacture (Harrington 1954: 10).

Context	SWSG		PMR SLIP		CREA		ENGS		PMR		PIPE		Context Date
	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	
03	2	18	1	3.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	AD 1800-1900
05	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	75	0	0	AD 1600-1800
014	2	2	0	0	4	8.5	2	7.2	0	0	1	1	AD 1700-1860
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20g</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3.5g</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8.5g</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7.2g</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>75g</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1g</b>	

Table 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

## 6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief carried out at this site has produced some really interesting results. The foundations of the medieval wall, built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century of the south aisle were recorded,. As has been mentioned, two roughly hewn sandstone blocks of medium size were found. They were facing the North, showed an East-West orientation and were parallel to the famous Norman 12<sup>th</sup>-century southern doorway. This doorway was reset when the south aisle was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Baggs et al 1990). This gives a dimension of the foundations of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century wall for the south aisle of a minimum of 0.70 m width.

Secondly, one of the test-pits excavated in the church's northern courtyard revealed the existence of an old crypt. Inside the chamber a deposit (14) was recorded which was not excavated but some pottery was found on the surface. The chronology obtained (see table 1 and 2) gives us a *terminus post quem* for dating the fill which originated sometime after 1860. Possibly fill (14) was the result of the different disturbances created by the major works of demolition and restoration carried out during Victorian times in 1877-8, by A. W. Blomfield (Baggs et al.1990). These works affected the southern part of the crypt **10** and possibly the vault **09** may have been partly dismantled.

The range of pottery types present in fill (14) indicates that there was domestic activity at the site during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The wares reflect a middle-class

social status. In fact, Baggs et al. (1990) mentioned how from the early 17th century until the mid-19th there was a schoolroom for the grammar school in the northern part of St Mary Magdalene Church and it included a living chamber. These pottery remains are probably the result of this domestic activity.

Once again, major repairs were carried out in the 1960s (Baggs et al.1990). These subsequently caused disturbances in the vault crypt due to the demolition of part of the west, south and east walls **10** by the digging of the service trench [12] and the installation of a clay pipe (011). Part of the fill (14) inside of the crypt is the result of the spoil created by placing the clay pipe (11), as a few pieces of concrete were found in it.

Regarding the chronology of the vault crypt and its use as a burial place, it is difficult to give an exact date with the evidence described. Crypt vault archaeology has started to be developed in recent years and there is a lack of comparative material (Elders et al. 2010). The dimensions of the crypt are rather modest, even small, with 1.85 m in length and 1.10 m in width. Late medieval crypt vaults tend to be smaller in size (Gilchrist & Sloane, 2005) than their equivalent in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Another clue that could give us a date about the construction period are the materials used. Bricks tend to be the dominant material from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The crypt and vault recorded were built using roughly hewn and square sandstone blocks, so it could be argued that the crypt was built before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, selection of building materials often depends on their availability in the local area.

In any case, the crypt belongs to a wealthy person or family who could afford to buy the luxury of being buried in an underground chamber. Rodwell has distinguished between 3 different types of burial vaults (2005: 175): the small burial chamber, the larger family vault and the communal crypt. The crypt that has been recorded in St Mary Magdalene Church fits within the first of these categories.

**Table 3: Context Inventory**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Chronology</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Test Pit/ Trench</b>
01	Fill	Layer	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Ground surrounding the Church	TP1, TP2 & TP3
02	Cut	Service trench	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Construction cut to place pipe	TP1, TP2 & TP3
03	Fill	Backfill	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Backfill over services	TP1, TP2 & TP3
04	Fill	Layer	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Layer protecting services	TP1, TP2 & TP3
05	Fill	Backfill/made ground	20 <sup>th</sup> century		TP 2
06	Cut	Service trench	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Construction cut to place pipe	TP 2
07	Fill	Backfill	20 <sup>th</sup> century		TP 2
08	Fill	Pipe	20 <sup>th</sup> century		TP 2
09	Masonry	Vault	14 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup> century	Vault of the crypt	TP 2
10	Masonry	Crypt	14 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup> century	Four walls of the crypt	TP 2
11	Fill	Pipe	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Clay pipe	TP 2
12	Cut	Service trench	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Construction cut to place pipe	TP 2
13	Fill	Backfill	20 <sup>th</sup> century		TP 2
14	Fill	Fill	19 <sup>th</sup> century	Deposit inside of the crypt	TP 2
15	Fill	Fill	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Concrete	TP 2
16	Fill	Backfill	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Backfill	TP 1
17	Fill	Fill	14 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup> century	Fill over the vault crypt	TP 2
18	Fill	Layer	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Tiles	Trench 3
19	Fill	Layer	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Concrete	Trench 3
20	Fill	Fill	20 <sup>th</sup> century	Possible levelling layer	Trench 3
21	Fill	Fill	Unknown	Clay deposit over church foundations <b>22</b>	Trench 3
22	Masonry	Masonry	13 <sup>th</sup> century	Foundations of the 13 <sup>th</sup> century church	Trench 3
23	Layer	Subsoil	Unknown		TP 3

## 7 ARCHIVE

### Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

#### Paper record

The project brief  
Written scheme of investigation  
The project report  
The primary site record

#### Physical record

Finds  
Environmental remains

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the Oxfordshire County Museums Service with accession number OXCMS:2016.13

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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