



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**  
**DURING TRIAL PIT EXCAVATION**  
**AT**  
**ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH,**  
**WOODSTOCK, OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SP 44386 16716**

*On behalf of*

*JBKS Architects*

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**JMHS Project No:** 3456  
**Site Code:** WSSMM 16

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## **Summary**

*This document represents the results of an investigation of the potential for archaeological remains in St Mary Magdalene Church, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 44386 16716). A square trial pit was excavated within the church but revealed no archaeological layer.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location**

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 Reason for the work**

A substantial reordering to the church is to be undertaken including a new floor. Before further progression some internal trial pits were excavated to investigate the substructure of the floor. As part of this the archaeological implications for a new floor were considered.

Thus, two 1sq m<sup>2</sup> trial holes were to be dug with a JMHS archaeologist in attendance.

### **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. Though the actual church was considerably altered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some more antiquated parts are still preserved. The most ancient part is the magnificent Norman south entrance with its zigzag decoration that dates back to the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century. The south aisle can be considered as a remnant of the previous church. Despite the Victorian remodelling, some 14<sup>th</sup> century carved capitals were kept to ornate the south pillars of the nave. From the same date remains also a stone font with gothic pattern beside the west entrance. The porch itself was erected one century later while the church tower is even a more recent addition, dating back to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The aims of the investigation were to record any earlier floors or burials within the proposed impact horizon for the new floor.

## **3 STRATEGY**

The trial pit was situated in the north aisle, against the lateral wall. Aligned with this one, another test pit was to be centred between the first two northern pillars of the nave, right after the entrance. However this was not necessary, see below.

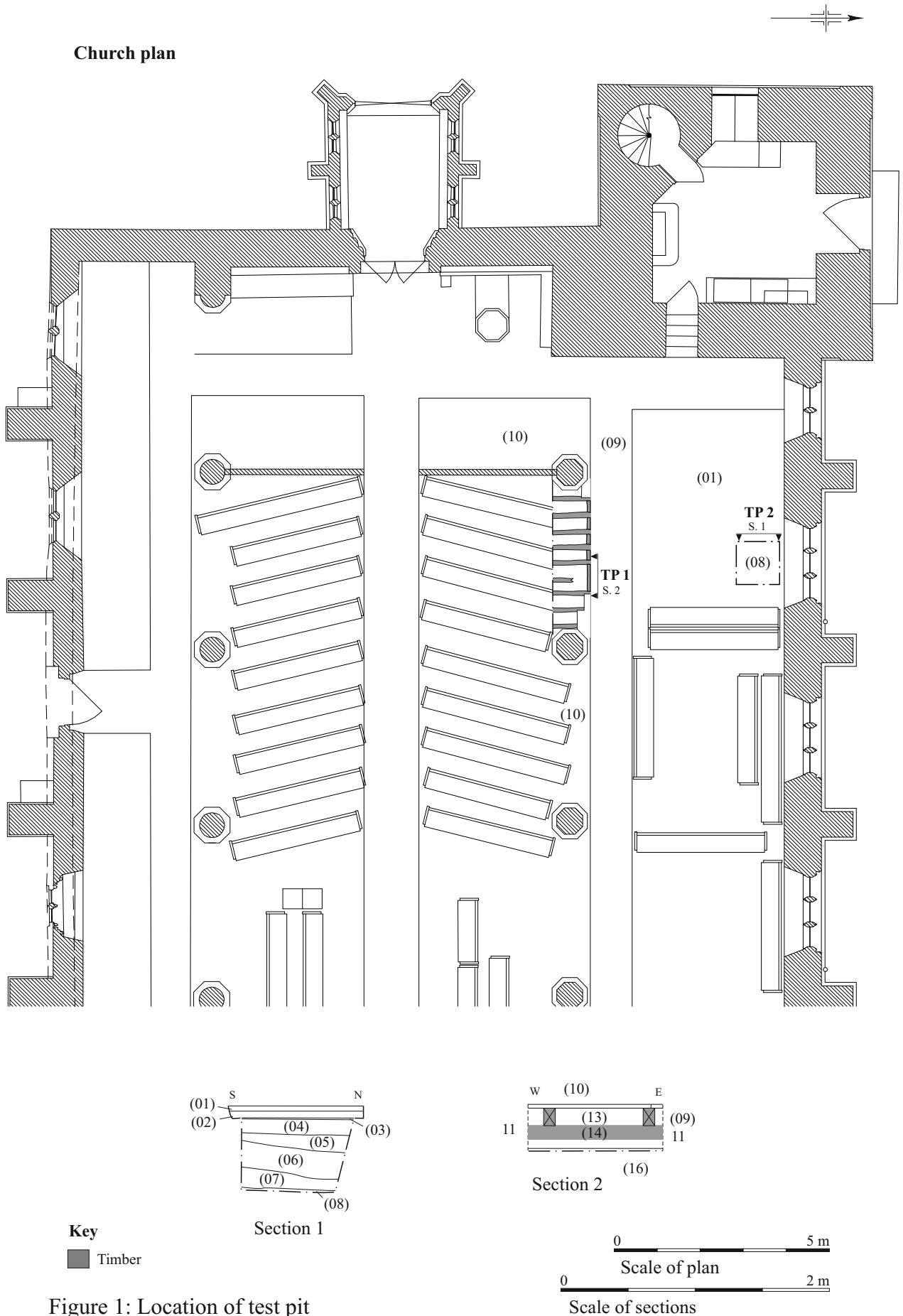


Figure 1: Location of test pit

The first day, after a meeting between contractors (Marc Gibson and Dean Taylor), archaeologist (Pierre-Damien Manisse), architect (Jos Rowe) and church warden (Mike Holmes), it was decided to start with the northern trial hole, as a ventilation shaft was suspected there. A depth of 1m was considered appropriate as no record of underlying layers was known, though the upcoming project would not impact the church soil that deep.

The first stage of this excavation consisted of individually marking the wooden floor tiles (**Plate 1**), so that they could be repositioned at the exact same place after completion of the job. As hard surface were encountered below, contractors had to use heavy duty drill to pierce through top layers. Subsequent deposits were removed using mattock, bar and shovel.

The second trial hole (**Plate 3**), between two pillars of the nave, originally planned as a one square meter hole, was finally more widely opened so that the contractors and architects had a better idea of the state of the joists supporting the actual floating floor. As a gap between the floor and the ground underneath was observed and was declared sufficient for the needs of the further renovation of the floor, no excavation was necessary there.

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 resultant spoil from the works was visually scanned, especially for finds relating to the medieval period and for human remains.

#### 4 RESULTS

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

As the north aisle was erected by A.W. Blomfield only in 1878, with no surprise, the first test pit (TP2) proved to be archaeologically negative. The intended air duct was not encountered and certainly lies further west. The floor (1) of this aisle consisted of wood tiles (76 x 220mm, 20mm thick), glued to the underlying concrete (2) by a thin bitumen binder. That concrete, 50mm thick, overlaid another 120mm thick concrete layer (4). In between lies another 2mm deposit of bitumen (3). Beneath, a levelling layer (5) was encountered made of yellowish/light brown unsorted sub-angular limestones (10-150mm) with yellowish brown sand. Below that a hard layer of grey limestone was found, whose thickness reached up to 300mm. We were uncertain whether it was the top of the geological deposit, an outcrop of marble Forest Formation, or part of the north wall foundation as it becomes thinner towards the south. Underneath was a mid-brown clay deposit (7), containing no inclusions and presumably undisturbed that might be part of the geology. Up to 220mm thick, it overlays another limestone layer (8), which was not excavated. This trial pit was 650mm deep, enough to ascertain the composition of the church ground.

The other trial hole (TP1), approximately 3.15 x 0.88m, revealed the substructure of the actual church floor. The floating floor (9), made of wooden laths (30mm thick for 180mm wide) rest on an array of north-south equidistant joists (11), measuring 80 x 100mm in section. This timber frame then lies on an east-west timber beam (14), measuring 110 x 180mm in section, visible underneath the junction of the walkway tiles and the wooden floating floor, between the pillars. Below the timber beam is masonry made of possibly cemented ashlar stones (15). Below is a yellowish powdery mortar (16). This is probably a base for a tiled/paved floor that existed before the Victorian reordering of the church. The mortar surface is 330mm below the top of the existing floor.

The reliability of the results is considered to be good. The archaeological watching brief took place with good light and visibility. Excellent cooperation from the ground workers and sufficient time enabled to investigate and record the exposed deposits to required standards.

## 5 FINDS

No finds were encountered during this phase of the project.

## 6 DISCUSSION

Considering the position of the trial work, in the more recent part of the church, and its limited size, it is no coincidence that no archaeological evidence other than the remains of the pre-Victorian floor were found. However there is still a low potential for the top of graves or pre-Victorian structures to be found during works associated with the new floor. The apparent limited impact of such work will ensure a good preservation of possible earlier remains.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

Pevsner, N & Sherwood, J. 1974 *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire*, pp.856-857.

## 8 PLATES



Plate 1: Wood tiles marked and removed Plate 2: Section 1



Plate 3: General view of trial hole 1



Plate 4: Section 2



**Table 1: Context Inventory**

Trial Hole	Context No.	Type	Relationships	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Interpretation	Date	Section No.	Plan No.	Drawing Sheet No.
TP2	1	layer	ol 2	wood tiles	0.02	>TP	>TP	No	floor (aisles)	01/03/16	1	1	1,2
TP2	2	layer	ol 3 ul 1	concrete	0.05	>TP	>TP	No	preparatory layer	01/03/16	1		2
TP2	3	layer	ol 4 ul 2	bitumen	0.002	>TP	>TP	No	preparatory layer	01/03/16	1		2
TP2	4	layer	ol 5 ul 3	concrete	0.12	>TP	>TP	No	preparatory layer	01/03/16	1		2
TP2	5	layer	ol 6 ul 4	yellowish unsorted sub-angular limestone and yellowish sand	0.18	>TP	>TP	No	levelling layer	01/03/16	1		2
TP2	6	layer	ol 7 ul 5	grey limestone	up to 0.30	>TP	>TP	No	stone outcrop?	01/03/16	1		2
TP2	7	layer	ol 8 ul 6	mid brown clay	up to 0.22	>TP	>TP	No	top geological layer	01/03/16	1		2
TP2	8	layer	ul 7	limestone, unexcavated	>0.01	>TP	>TP	No	geological layer	01/03/16	1	1	1,2
TP1	9	layer	ol 11	wood laths (width=0.18)	0.03	>TP	>TP	No	floating floor (nave)	03/03/16	2	1	1,2
TP1	10	layer	ol 12	CBM tiles	0.03	>TP	>TP	No	floor (pathway)	03/03/16	2	1	1,2
TP1	11	timber	ol 14 ul 09	joists	0.10	0.08	>0.88	No	support of floor	03/03/16	2	1	1,2
TP1	12	layer	ul 10	concrete	0.10	>TP	>TP	No	preparatory layer	03/03/16			
TP1	13	layer	ol 14 ul 09	loose packing of stones between joists on beam	0.10	>TP	>TP	No	stone packing	03/03/16	2		2
TP1	14	timber	ol 15 ul 13	beam	0.11	0.18	>3.15	No	support of joists	03/03/16	2	1	1,2
TP1	15	masonry	ol 16 ul 14	cemented stones	0.20	N/A	>3.15	No	masonry	03/03/16	2		2
TP1	16	layer	ul 15	yellowish mortar	>0.01	>TP	>TP	No		03/03/16	2	1	1,2