

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, FARINGDON

OXFORDSHIRE

On behalf of

Parochial Parish Council

AUGUST 2010

REPORT FOR Parochial Church Council
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FIELDWORK 11-12 August 2010

REPORT ISSUED 25 August 2010

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Site Code FAAS 10
JMHS Project No: 2228
Archive Location The archive is currently held by JMHS and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service under Accession No. 2010.57

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological investigation at All Saints' Church in Faringdon, Oxfordshire (NGR: 28687 95596) in August 2010. In total three trenches were opened up in order to determine the levels of preserved burials in different areas of the cemetery. The investigation proved that burials are present in the ground west, north and northeast of the church. These burials were found on different levels and could therefore be from different periods. Another purpose of the investigation was to establish the level of the natural in different areas of the cemetery. The natural was located with an auger and encountered at depths ranging between c. 107.00-107.90 m AOD.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The evaluation site was located within the churchyard of All Saints' Church in central Faringdon (NGR 28687 95596) on gently sloping ground at an approximate height of c. 109m AOD. The underlying geology according the Geological Survey of Great Britain (Sheet 253) is Corallian sand and limestone although clay was found by auger in Trench 2.

1.2 Planning Background

The proposed works include construction of an extension on the northern side of the church. There is a considerable build up in ground levels on the north side and this raises the possibility that a significant number of human burials may be affected by the planned ground works. This phase of archaeological investigation was intended to determine the level at which burials are encountered and the density of burials present at a series of possible locations for the extension. The result will help in selection of a site for the extension and possible foundation design.

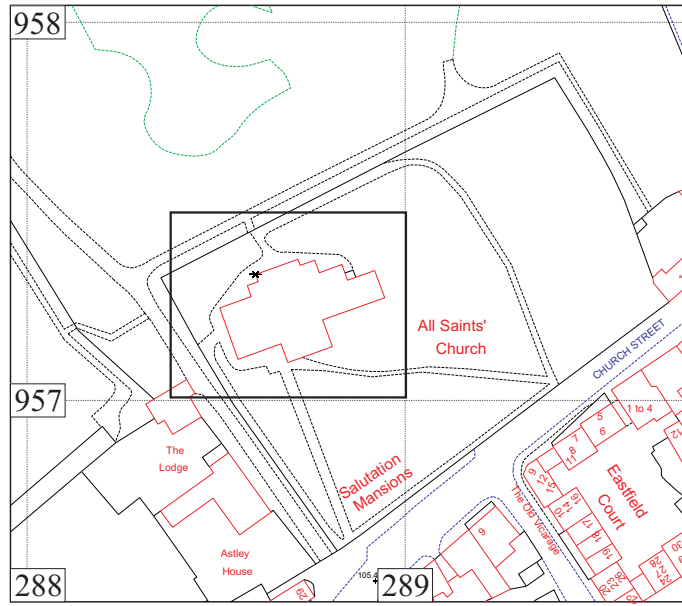
1.3 Archaeological Background

All Saints Church was originally constructed in the 12th century on the site of a late Saxon Minster church. The nave and lower part of the crossing tower date from this period, with the chancel, north transept, and upper part of the tower added in the 13th century. During the 14th century a chapel and west aisle were added to the north transept.

Further alterations were carried out in the 15th century, including the building of the northeast chapel. The top of the tower and spire were removed in 1645 and the result is an unusually low structure. Around 1853 Hugnal rebuilt the south aisle and south transept. A vestry and baptistery were also added on the north side of the church. The building is Listed Grade I.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:



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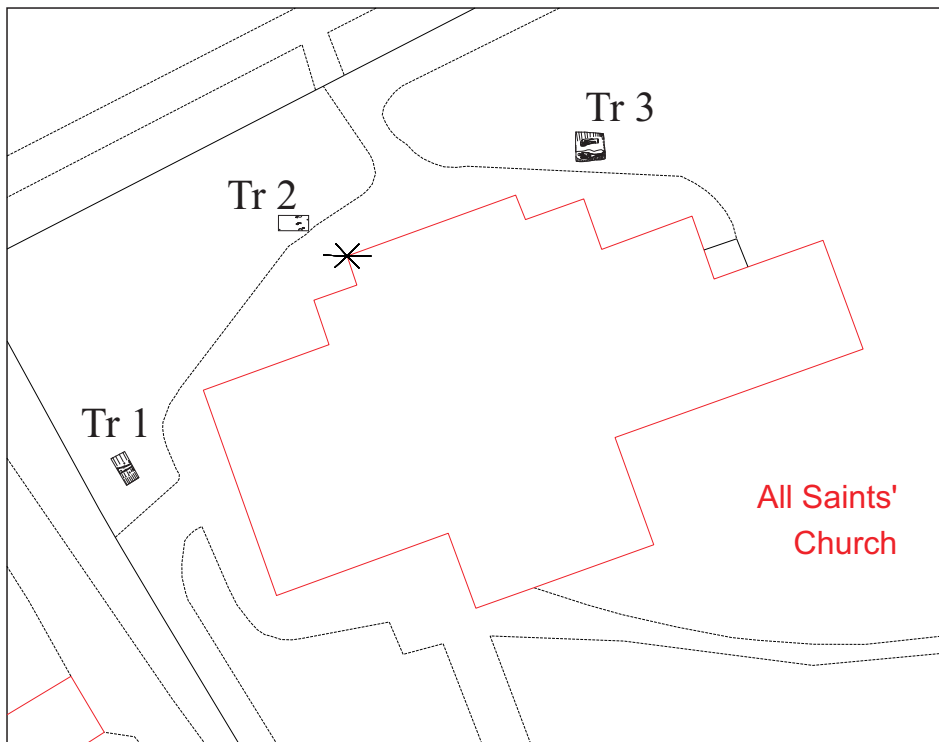


Figure 1. Site location

- To determine the extent to which human remains survive in the affected area.
- To generally observe the presence of burial vaults and graves.
- To inform archaeological strategy for the construction work.
- To provide a report and ordered archive on the investigation.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Site procedure for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Specification* (Munby 2010). The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999).

An experienced archaeological Project Officer undertook the site monitoring and recording under the overall direction of John Moore, MIFA.

3.2 Methodology

The three trenches were excavated by a 360° type tracked excavator fitted with a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket (Fig. 1). The soil was removed with the excavator until preserved human remains could be seen in each trench. The revealed burials and other archaeological features were cleaned by hand and recorded in plan, by written record and photographically. In order to establish the level of the natural an augur was used in some trenches. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

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 context sheet was also produced for every archaeological feature and deposit. A full photographic record of the trenches was completed using 35mm format black and white film, colour film and digital cameras.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999).

4 RESULTS

A number of burials and features of archaeological interest were found during the archaeological recording action. All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material whilst the other numbers reflect features 'cut' into preceding layers or structures. The position of the trenches and the location of the features are shown on Figures 1-3).

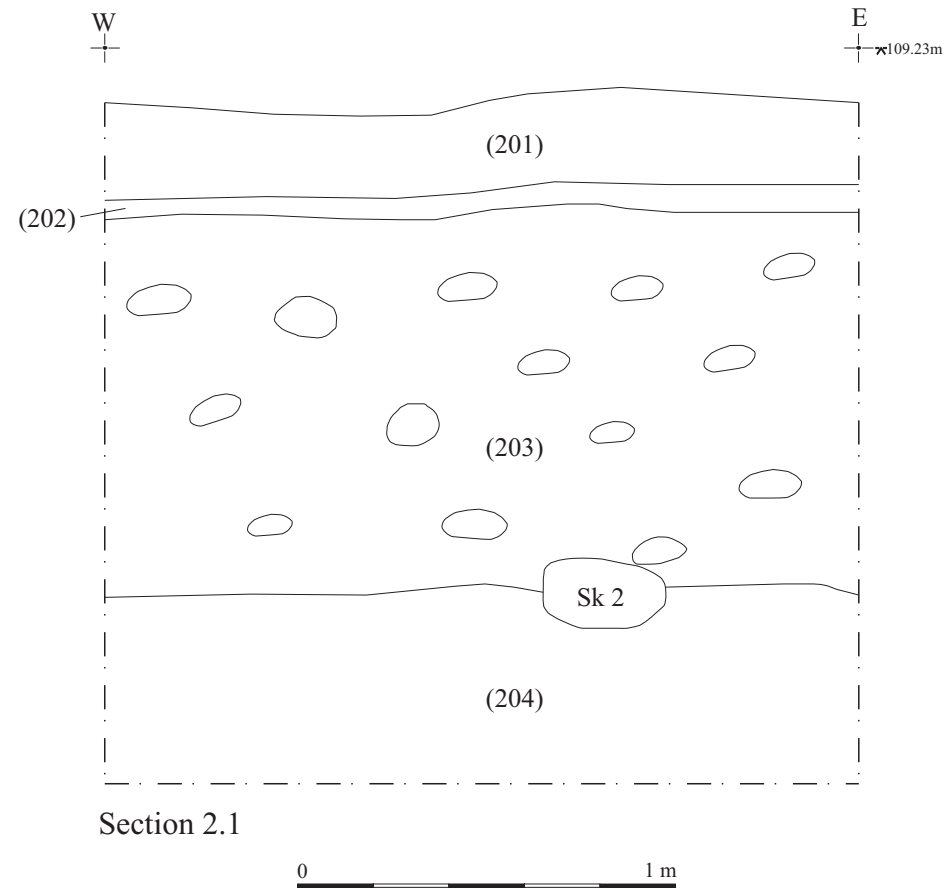
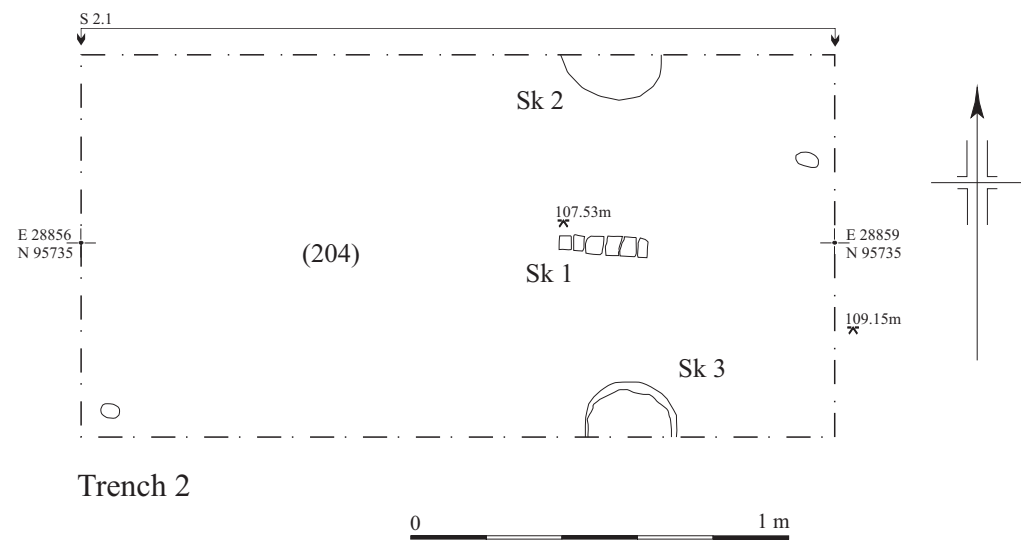
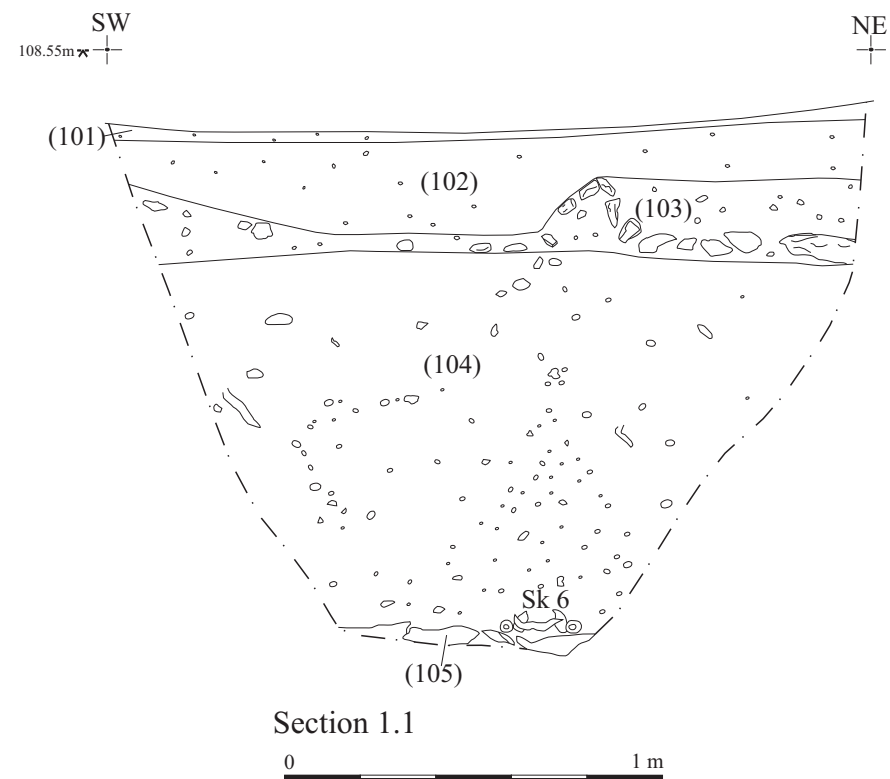
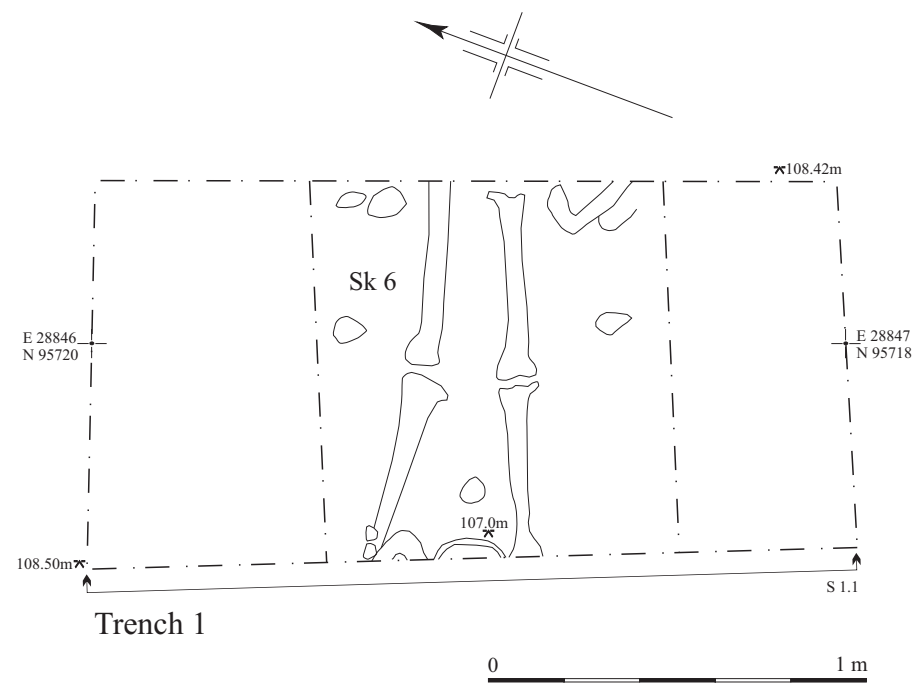


Figure 2. Trenches 1 & 2 Plans and sections

4.1 Field Results

Trench 1 (Figure 2)

The lowest deposit in Trench 1 was the natural yellow-grey limestone rock (105). The natural was found at 1.3 m below the present ground surface. The solid nature of the limestone showed that no features had been cut into the natural within this trench. Overlying the natural was a firm mid-grey layer of sandy silt with an inclusion of charcoal and limestone (104). This layer was about 1m thick and contained a preserved burial (Skeleton 6) on a level of 107m AOD.

The skeleton was orientated E-W and was within deposit (104) but resting directly on the uppermost surface of natural limestone rock. Only the legs of the skeleton were visible in the trench, but the size of the bones suggests that they come from an adult male. No cut for the burial (Skeleton 6) was visible in layer (104), but the layer was interpreted as graveyard material.

Overlying layer (104) was a 0.07-0.22m thick compact layer of light yellow sand mixed with limestone (103). Layer (103) was slightly different from the overlying layer (102) which consisted of compact mid orange-yellow silty sand with moderate inclusions of gravel. The uppermost deposit in Trench 1 was the 0.04-0.07m thick topsoil of loose dark brown-grey loam (101).

Trench 2

Augur

The natural in Trench 2 (205) was located with the help of an augur and was reached at a level of 1.8m below the present ground surface (*c.* 107.29m AOD). The overlying deposit was a 0.5m thick loose grey-brown sandy silt (204). The layer was interpreted as a level of old cemetery soil.

Machine

The base of the machine excavated trench revealed layer (204) where human remains from three individuals were observed (Skeletons 1, 2 and 3). Skeleton 1 only consisted of six vertebrae from the spine of an adult individual. The spine was orientated E-W and the level of the skeleton (107.53 AOD) suggests that it could be a medieval burial. No cut for the burial was however visible in the higher layers. Skeletons 2 and 3 were represented by two craniums visible in the northern and southern sections in Trench 2. These two skulls were found *c.* 300mm higher than the vertebrae (Fig. 2, Section 2.1).

Overlying layer (204) was a *c.* 1m thick semi-compact layer of brown-grey sandy silt with inclusions of limestone and charcoal (203). A fragment of roof-tile and two sherds of medieval pottery (probably East Wiltshire ware) were also visible in this layer. Layer (203) was overlaid by a *c.* 0.05m thick layer of loose brown-yellow sand (202). This layer is further graveyard material and was only covered by the topsoil (201). The uppermost deposit in Trench 2 was the 0.25m thick topsoil of loose grey-brown loam (201).

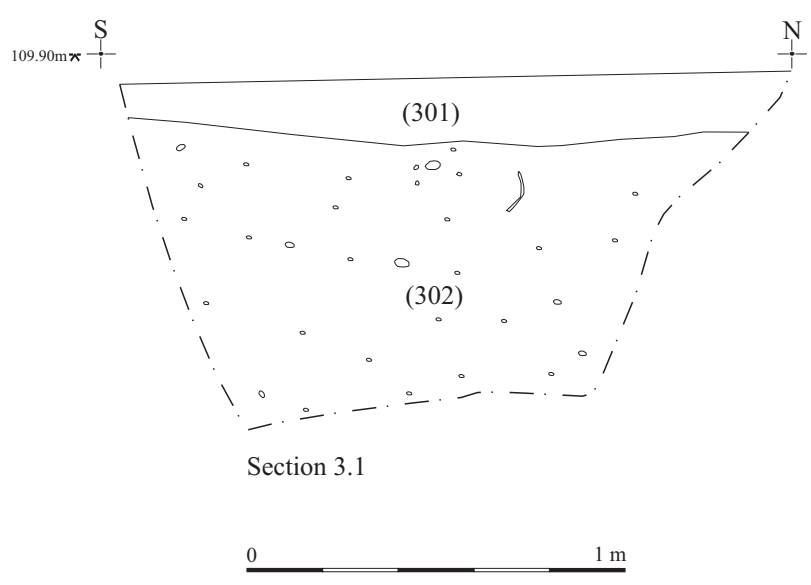
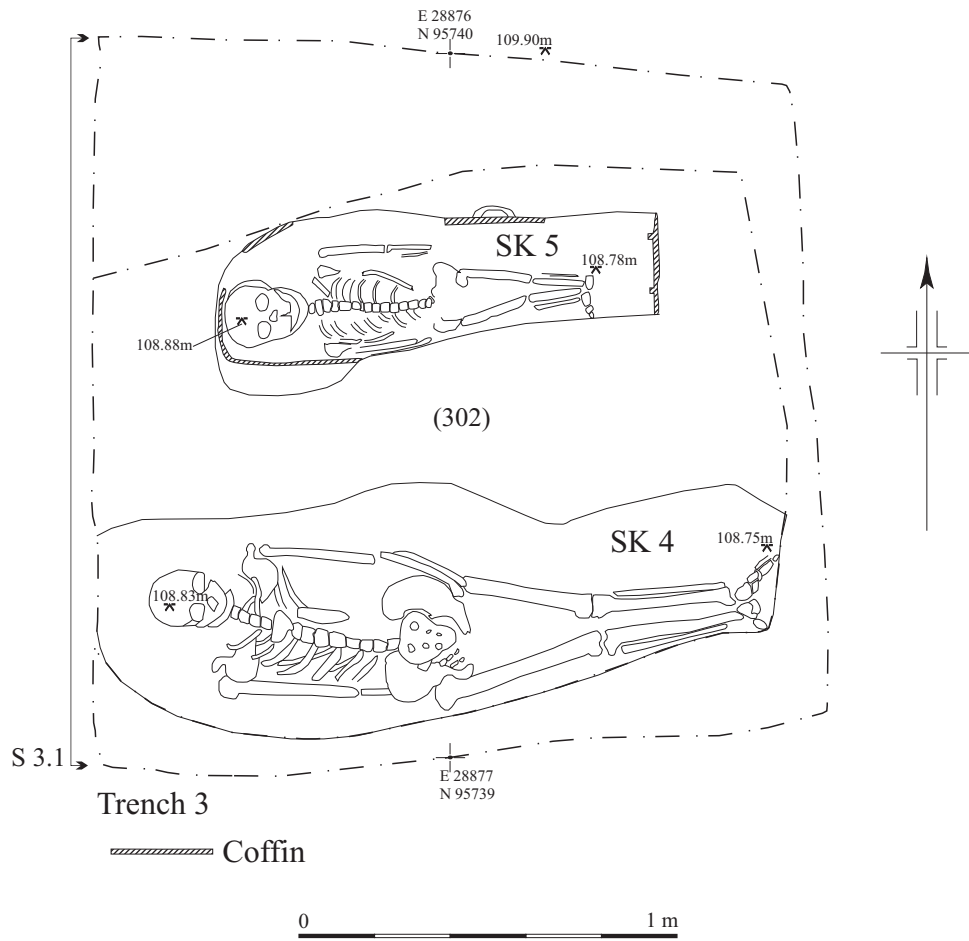


Figure 3. Trench 3 Plan and section

Trench 3

Augur

The lowest deposit in Trench 3 was the natural white-grey silty clay (303). The natural was found using an augur and was reached about 2m below the present ground surface (c. 107.90m AOD). This means that the natural was almost 1m higher than the bottom of Trench 1.

Machine

The reason why the excavation in Trench 3 stopped on this level was that two burials (Skeletons 4 and 5) were found on a level of 108.75-108.88 m AOD. Skeletons 4 and 5 in Trench 3 were therefore on a much higher level than the burials in Trench 1 and 2.

Skeleton 4 was about 1.65m tall and the shape of the skull and pelvis suggests that it belongs to an adult female. The teeth were very worn, indicating that the skeleton could come from an old individual. Skeleton 5 was only about 1m tall and belongs therefore to a young individual. The skeleton had been buried in a partly preserved wooden coffin with iron reinforcements, suggesting that the burial is from the 18th or the 19th century.

Skeletons 4 and 5 were both found in a 1m thick compact layer consisting of dark brown-black silty clay with inclusions of limestone and charcoal (302). No cuts for the two burials were however visible in the sections of Trench 3. The uppermost deposit in Trench 3 was the 0.1-0.25m thick and loose topsoil of dark brown loam (301). The topsoil contained three sherds of medieval pottery (2 of Brill/Boarstall ware, 1 unidentified) and a fragment of window glass.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The archaeological work was mainly carried out in good conditions with excellent co-operation from the contractors carrying out the ground works and the results are felt to be representative of the extant archaeology.

5 FINDS

Generally the preference was to leave finds of minor significance *in-situ*, or to rebury them in a position as near as possible to their places of origin. The presence of pottery and other artefacts of importance for dating and understanding the stratigraphical sequences on the site were however noted on the context sheets during the recording.

6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of the investigation at All Saints' Church in Faringdon was to determine the extent to which human remains survive in the affected area and to inform the proposed development work. The investigation showed that preserved burials are

present in the ground west, north and northeast of the church. The burials were found on different levels and could therefore be of different dates.

The two skeletons in Trench 3 (Skeleton 4 and 5) were found next to one another and were both dug into the raised ground north of the church. It has been suggested that the higher ground in the churchyard are the remains of earthworks of a battery from the Civil War in the 17th century (*pers comm.* John Gillman, former Mayor of Faringdon). It is a historical fact that battles took place in the area around 1645 AD; the spire of the church was apparently destroyed during the Civil War and a canon ball from that period is still preserved in the church (Hayhurst-France 1995). However, the position of the 'earthworks' is too close to the church to seem to make sense. The possibility is that the higher ground results from when the vestry was constructed during the Victorian period or that the paths in the area were lowered or altered for more level access. The height of burials in Trench 3 would indicate that they were interred after the earth had been placed in this area.

Skeleton 1 has been truncated by Skeletons 2 and 3. The missing skull also suggests that there is another burial to the west that has truncated the top of Skeleton 1. The cut for it was not visible. The number of burials in the trenches indicate that the majority of the proposed development area has been used for burial and that at least *one burial exists in the majority of the area. It is probable that in places two layers of burials survive and it is possible that in discrete areas more layers could be present.*

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