



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
ST MARY THE VIRGIN,
DATCHET, BERKSHIRE
NGR SU 9878 7711

On behalf of
The Parochial Church Council

FEBRUARY 2010

REPORT FOR The Parochial Church Council
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation at the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Datchet. Two trenches revealed remains of burials dating from the medieval or later period. A total of twelve grave cuts with five inhumations were observed, with residual pottery from the Roman period onwards. The burials were not exposed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is the church of St Mary the Virgin lying to the north of the west end of London Road, Datchet at NGR SU 9878 7711. The geology is Shepperton Gravel (First Terrace) River Gravel Deposits.

1.2 Planning Background

It is the intention to demolish an existing pre-fabricated extension to the church and replace with a larger brick and tile extension. As part of the consideration of this an archaeological evaluation is required by the Oxford Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (ODAA). An Archaeological Recording Specification was prepared by the ODAA. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services outlining the method by which the archaeological evaluation was to be carried out to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

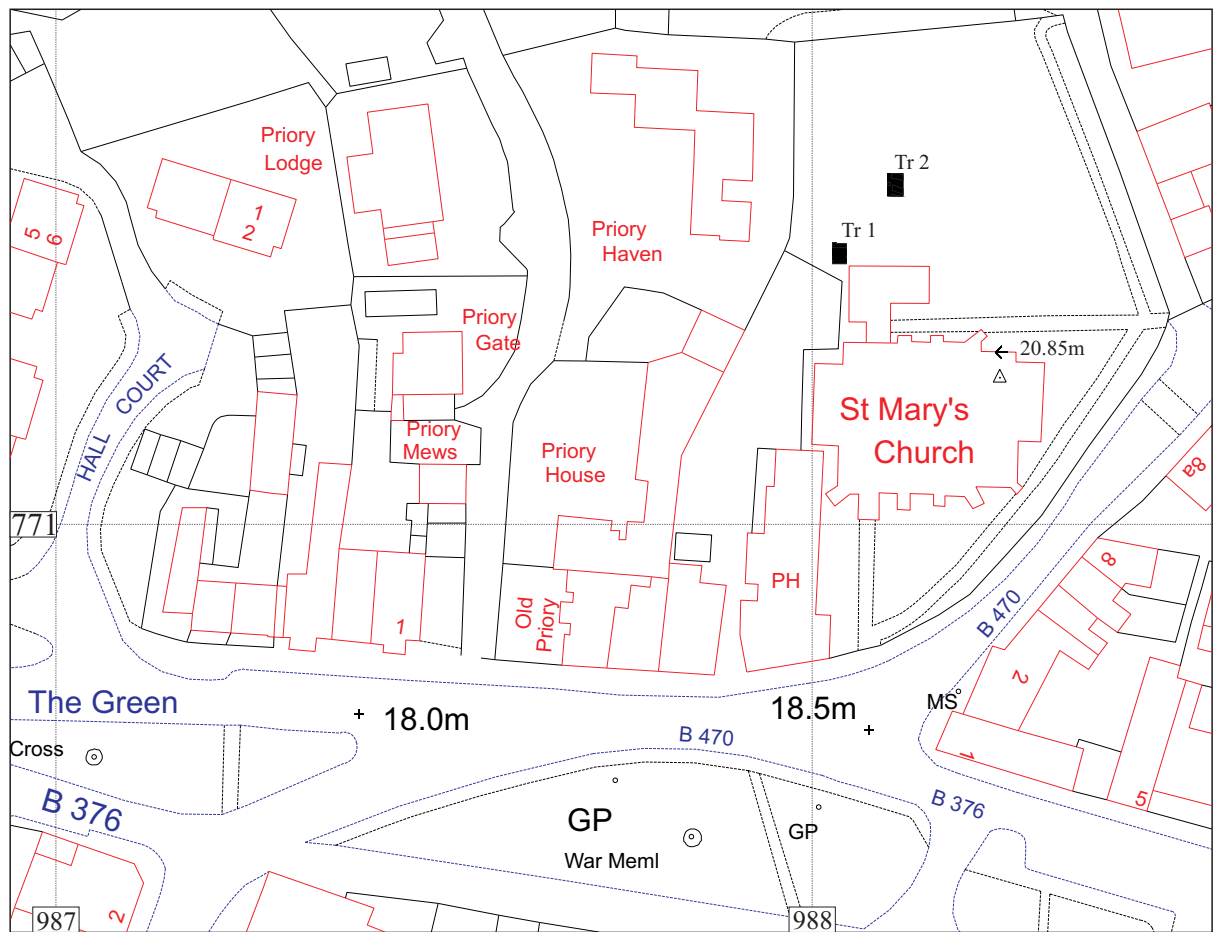
1.3 Archaeological Background

The earliest surviving parts of the church are areas of Totternhoe stonework in the chancel from the 13th or 14th century. The church was considerably enlarged in 1857-64 through a major rebuilding programme by Brandon. In 1857 the nave and aisles were rebuilt, but in 1860 the north transept and an octagonal steeple were added. The nave and north aisle were extended westwards and the south aisle eastwards in 1864. The timber south porch dates from 1867. The church is listed Grade II.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

A number of graves are known to exist under the existing structure, and these at least will be disturbed by the construction of the new building, although the design of the foundations is intended to reduce this impact. There is a risk that further, unrecorded graves or vaults may be present. The aims of the investigation as laid out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* were as follows:

- To determine the depth at which burials exist in the area proposed for the new building.



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Figure 1. Site location

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a Specification issued by Oxford Diocesan Archaeological Advisor JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the excavation of two trenches within the footprint of the proposed new build (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The investigation involved the mechanical excavation of two trenches by a mini-excavator equipped with a ditching bucket, supplemented by limited hand investigation of archaeological deposits. The integrity of archaeological features or deposits that might better be excavated in conditions pertaining to full excavation, or might warrant preservation *in situ*, were not compromised.

The trenches measured 3m by 2m each in plan.

Site procedures carried out will follow IfA guidelines and the requirements of the Berkshire Archaeology.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Fieldwork

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. All contexts numbers are preceded by trench number and /. Due to the very soft edges of the deep trenches cleaning was cursory.

Trench 1 (Figs. 1 & 2)

Trench 1 was located to the northeast of the present prefab located on the north side of the church, on the west side of the proposed new church hall. The top of the trench was 20.02m AOD at the south end, dropping to 19.91m AOD at the north end. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of c. 1.8m, which was the full extent of the excavator's reach. Burials which occurred higher than this were not further investigated and were left *in situ*. Three skeletons were observed during the evaluation in Trench 1. A further four grave cuts were observed, but were not investigated in the trench, either as they were only observed in section, or were beyond the full extent of the mini-excavator's reach.

The earliest deposit observed was the natural bright yellow, lightly silty sand (1/03) & (1/11), which occurred at its highest point at c. 19.45m AOD. Overall, the natural sand survived between some grave cuts to such a height, but elsewhere was heavily truncated to a height of c. 18.70m AOD.

The earliest grave cuts observed were 1/17, 1/14, 1/08 and 1/13. Of these grave cuts, only 1/8 revealed the skeleton, Sk 2, of an inhumation. The grave cut 1/8 was located in the middle of the trench and oriented, as were all grave cuts, east/west. The west end extended beyond the western limits of excavation, and only the southern part of the grave cut and associated skeleton survived, the rest having been truncated by 1/10. The observed grave cut measured 1.54m east/west, between 0.44m and 0.26m north/south, and was more than 0.82m deep. The associated skeleton, Sk 2, had been heavily truncated on the lower left side of the body. The left foot, fibula, tibia, femur and ilium were not present. It was not ascertained whether the sacrum was present, but lumbar vertebrae certainly were. Some left metacarpals were also present over the pelvic region. The right metacarpals were parallel with the dorsal end of the right femur. The body had clearly been disturbed by the later grave cut 1/10. The grave fill (1/07) was mid to dark grey brown silty sand with c. 10% peagrit gravel.

The other grave cuts did not yield any inhumations. The cut 1/13, to the north of 1/8, was machine-excavated to a depth of 1.78m below ground level, and subsequently augured to a maximum depth of c. 2.5m or c. 17.5m AOD. Excavation was not carried out due to reasons in the introduction to field results. The cut measured 1.8m east/west, and was truncated on the south side by 1/19, which itself had been significantly truncated, also by 1/10. The grave cut 1/13 appeared to have been truncated on the north side by the burial immediately to the north of the trench, the headstone of which is marked in on Fig. 2. The fill was dirty yellow slightly silty sand with 10% peagrit (1/12).

To the south of 1/8 were two grave cuts only seen in section. On the east side of the trench 1/14 measured approximately 0.65m north/south and 0.7m deep. It appeared to have been cut by 1/10 to the north and 1/06 to the south. The grave-fill (1/15) was mid to dark grey brown silty sand with 10% peagrit. This was the west end of the grave cut as the cut did not penetrate the natural sand 1/03 within the trench.

On the west side of the trench and also cut by 1/6, was the grave cut 1/17. Only a small part of this cut was observed in the southwest corner of the trench. The grave-fill (1/16) was a black sticky humic silty sand.

The possible grave cut 1/19, cut the top of grave cut 1/13. It was heavily truncated by 1/10 to the south. Only 0.4m (north/south) of the 0.6m deep cut were observed during the evaluation. The fill (1/18) was the same as (1/16).

The grave cut 1/06 was located at the south end of the trench and was oriented east by southeast/west by northwest. It measured at least 1.7m long, and more than 0.68m wide, extending under the limits of excavation to the east and west as well as south. The initial backfilling of the grave appeared to comprise a dirty yellow slightly silty sand with 10% peagrit (1/05); this grave-fill was seen in other graves. Within it was the very defined possible form of a coffin, defined by the edges of deposit (1/04), a dark grey brown silty sand with 8-10% peagrit gravel, similar to (1/15); a single residual sherd of Romano-British pottery was present in (1/04). A skeleton, Sk 1, represented by a skull, which was damaged during machining, was recorded at a height of 18.91m AOD. Given the limited investigation it is possible that the fill (1/05) and cut (1/06) indicate an earlier burial, rather than their forming part of the same grave as Sk 1.

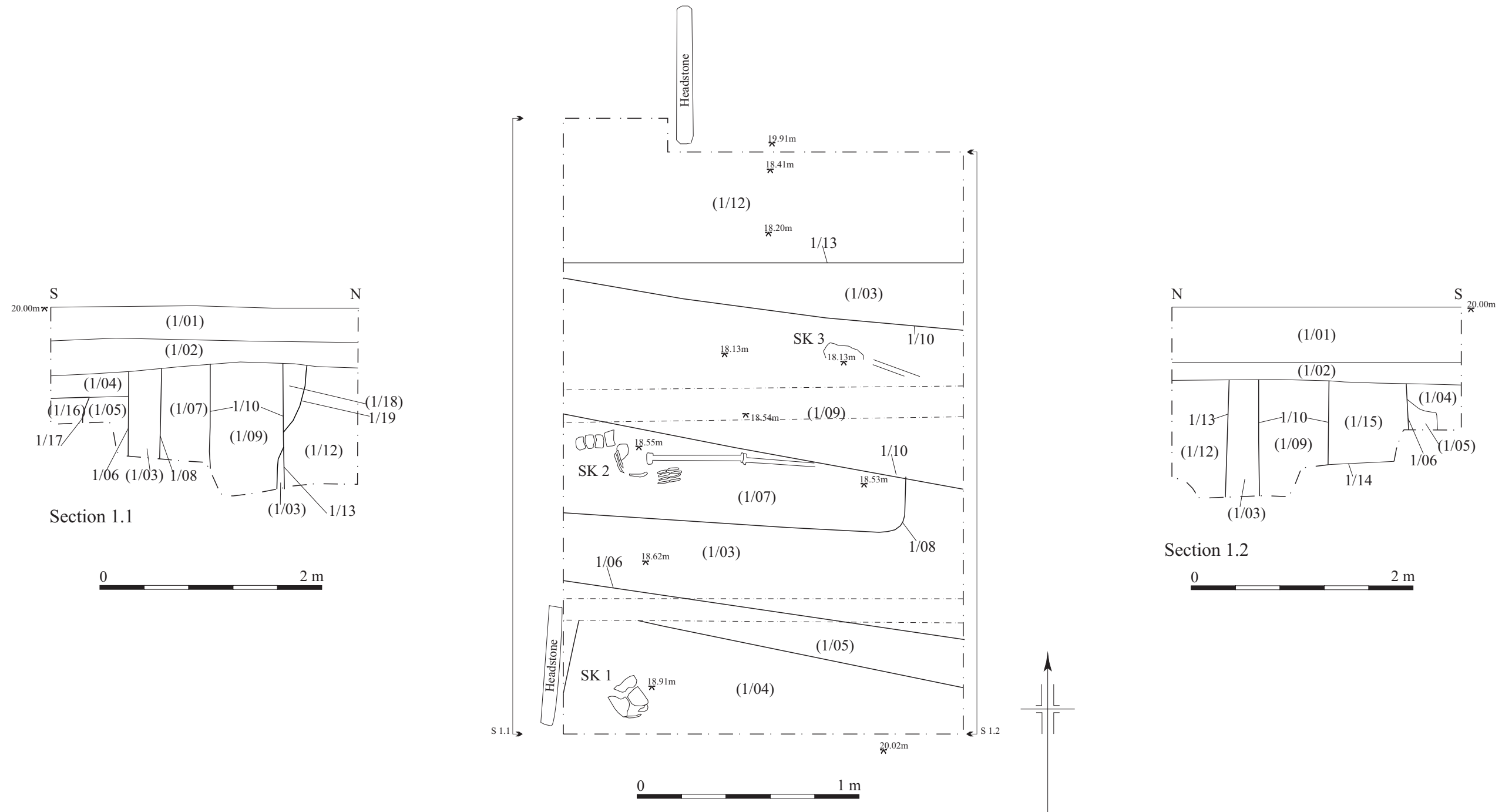


Figure 2. Trench 1 Plans and sections

Grave 1/10 was located to the north, cutting the north side of grave 1/08. The grave was roughly parallel with the fill (1/04) associated with Sk1. The grave cut measured more than 2m east by southeast/west by northwest, extending beyond the limits of excavation. It measured c. 0.6m north/south. A fragment of left ilium and the shaft of a left femur Sk3 were observed on the north side of the cut. It appeared that ironwork was present under the ilium, although no extensive investigation was carried out due to the reasons in the introduction to field results. No further human remains were observed within the grave cut, which was at the limit of the mini-excavator's reach at a height of 18.13m AOD, or c. 1.9m below modern ground level. The grave-fill (1/09) was similar to (1/04).

Sealing all the graves was a deposit of moderately compact dark grey brown humic sandy silt with 4% peagrit gravel (1/02), measuring up to 0.2m thick. A single sherd of pottery dating from the 19th century and some charnel was present in the layer which extended across the trench, which may represent a levelling or graveyard clearance deposit. Topsoil (1/01), measuring 0.3m sealed the whole trench.

Trench 2 (Figs. 1 & 3)

Trench 2 was located to the northwest of Trench 1 on the east side of the proposed new church hall. The top of the trench was at 19.97m AOD and was machined down to a maximum depth of 1.65m below modern ground level. The edges of this trench were less stable than Trench 1 and so only the east-facing section of the west wall of the trench was drawn. This west wall-section was the location of a step enabling access to the trench (Fig. 3).

Natural gravel (2/02) was observed at the south end of the trench. In the northern half of the trench were two similar deposits of mixed dirty yellow slightly silty sand and peagrit gravel (2/03) and (2/10). The dirty gravel (2/03) and (2/10) was present between 19.53m AOD, just below the topsoil, and 18.62m AOD, where excavation ceased. It was not bottomed. Due to the constraints of excavation, it was not clear during the evaluation whether (2/03) and (2/10) represent the fill of actual grave cuts, or whether they represent a more general deposit of cemetery soil.

The base of the trench revealed three grave cuts, of which two, 2/06 and 2/12, cut (2/10) and yielded skeletal remains. A third grave cut 2/04 was visible at the south end of the trench cutting the natural (2/02). The grave cut 2/06 was oriented east by southeast/west by northwest, and measured c. 1.6m long by 0.72m wide, extending beyond the east wall of the trench. It was not excavated. A human skull and several cervical vertebrae, Sk 4, were found during machining. They were located at 18.28m AOD. These bones were sealed by grave fill (2/07), a friable dark brown grey silty sand with 8-10% peagrit, which was more than 1m thick above the base of the trench.

To the north grave cut 2/12 was also oriented east by southeast/west by northwest, and measured c. 1.6m long by 0.78m wide. It extended under the east wall of the trench and the access step on the west side of the trench. It was not excavated, but the right ilium, lumbar and some thoracic vertebrae, and the right humerus and radius of the skeleton, Sk 5, were revealed at 18.43m AOD. It was sealed by grave fill (2/11), which was similar to (2/07). A single sherd of residual Romano-British pot was recovered from (2/11). The top of the deposit was 19.53m AOD.

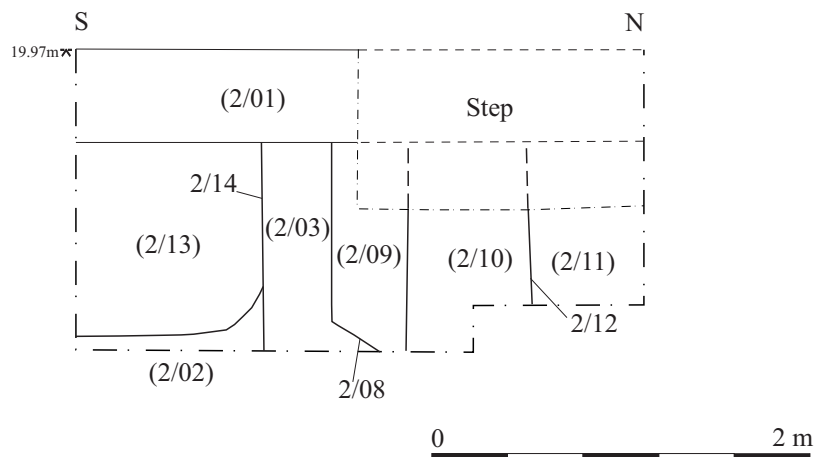
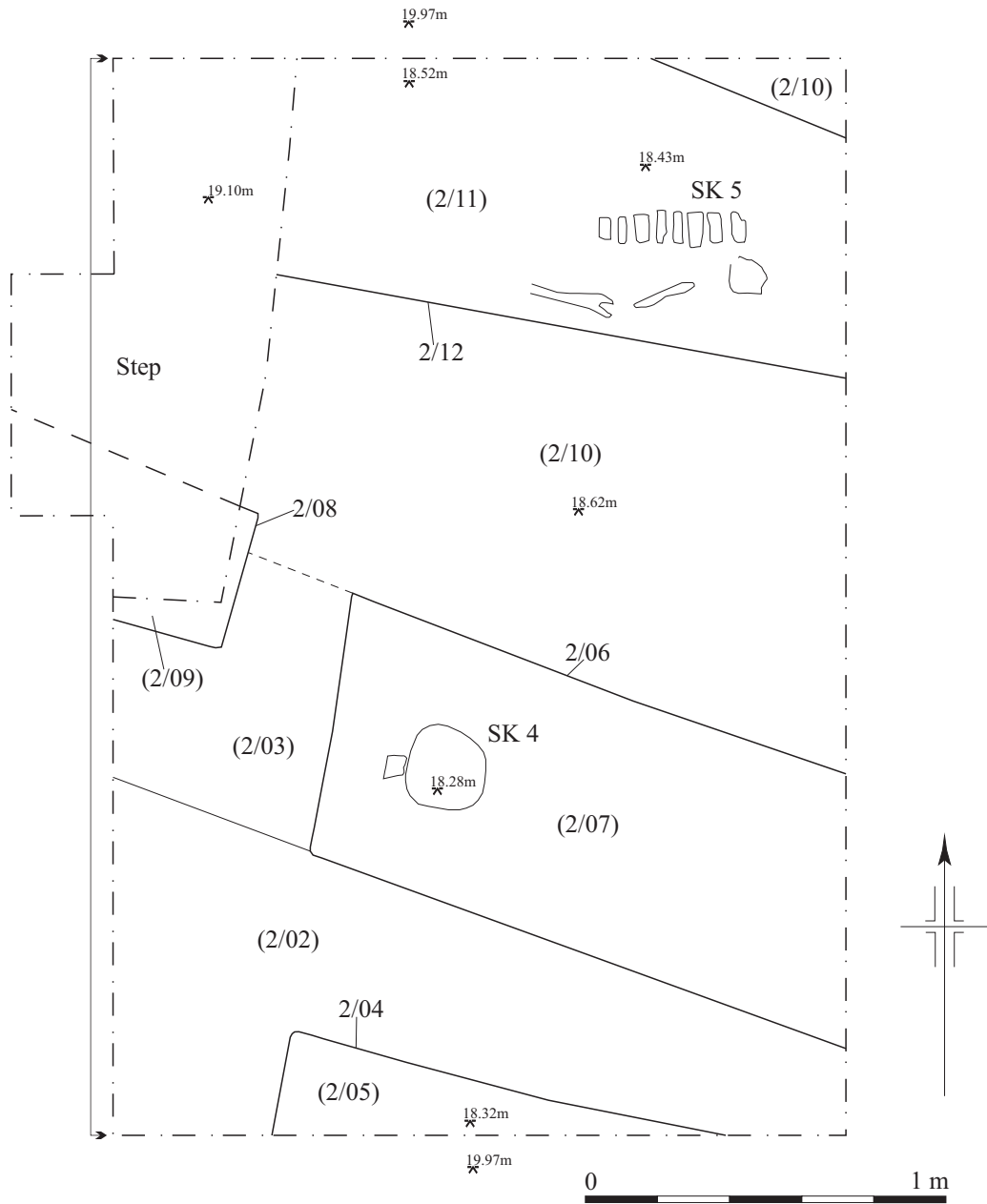


Figure 3. Trench 2 Plan and section

At the south end of the trench the corner of grave cut 2/04 extended beyond the southern limits of excavation. It was oriented east by southeast/west by northwest, and measured c. 1.2m long by c. 0.3m wide. No skeleton was observed. The cut was filled with grave fill (2/05), which was similar to (2/07). Pottery recovered from (2/05) dated from the mid-13th century onwards, and was probably residual. The fill was observed at 18.32m AOD. The south wall was only cursorily cleaned due to reasons in the introduction.

Two further grave cuts were observed in the east-facing west section of the trench. Grave cut 2/14, which measured 0.98m north/south and 1m deep, was located at the south end of the trench. It appeared, during the evaluation, that only the very eastern end of the grave cut was revealed. No skeleton was observed. The grave was filled with grave fill (2/13), which was similar to (2/07). The top of the grave fill (2/13) was at 19.53m AOD.

To the north, grave cut 2/08 measured c. 0.4m east/west, c. 0.5m north/south and 1.1m deep. No skeleton was observed. The grave fill was (2/09), which was similar to (2/07). The top of the fill was at 19.53m AOD.

All grave cuts were sealed by topsoil (2/1), which was c. 0.4m deep. Two sherds of residual Romano-British pottery and a sherd of post-medieval redware were recovered from the topsoil.

4.3 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good, and an accurate record of the archaeological remains. The archaeological evaluation, took place during dry weather.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 7 sherds with a total weight of 439g. It consisted of a mixture of Romano-British, medieval and post-medieval wares. Where appropriate, it was recorded using the codings and chronology of the provisional type series of the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (Jones 1998, 211-238), as follows:

WW: Whitewares, 13th – 15th century. 1 sherd, 21g.

RW: Post-medieval redwares, mid-16th – 18th century. 1 sherd, 276g.

The following, not covered by the Surrey type-series, was also noted:

19thC: Mass-produced white earthenwares 19th – 20th century. 1 sherd, 94g

Four sherds (48g) of Romano-British material were also noted. These comprised entirely grey wares, apart from a single fragment of an Oxford Ware mortarium. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The pottery was generally all in good condition, and appears reliably stratified.

Tr	Cntxt	RB		SWW		GRE		19thC		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	2							1	94	19thC
1	4	1	36							RB
2	1	2	6			1	276			M16thC
2	5			1	21					M13thC
2	11	1	6							RB
	Total	4	48	1	21	1	276	1	94	

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken as the potential of the deposits was not felt to be sufficient to warrant sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation at St Mary the Virgin, Datchet revealed evidence for twelve grave cuts, of which five were observed to contain skeletal remains. No burial was excavated, and only a cursory cleaning of the visible bone was carried out, due to the depth of excavation and the sandy quality of the soil, in order to ascertain that those bones observed were indeed *in situ*, rather than charnel.

Roman pottery was recovered from one grave fill in Trench 1 and from two grave fills in Trench 2. This residual pottery is indicative of the proximity of Roman activity to St Mary the Virgin. An evaluation carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit identified Roman features c. 2km to the northeast of the current site (Roberts 2000). A large complex of levelled Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age or Roman enclosures, field systems and boundary features lie to the south of Datchet at Southlea (Gates 1975, map 30).

A single sherd of Surrey White ware dating to 13th to 15th century was recovered from grave cut 2/4, fill (2/05). An evaluation carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services at Horton Rd, c.100m southeast of the current site indicated that the adjacent site had fallen out of use by the 13th century (Ford 2008).

The majority of the grave cuts are present from below the graveyard clearance deposit (1/02) or the topsoil (1/01) and (1/02), indicating that they are all probably post-medieval, as during the medieval period, burial was preferred on the south and east sides of the church (Rodwell 1989: 146). The grave cuts were located between 19.53m and 18.13m AOD, although several of the grave cuts observed in plan in both Trenches 1 and 2 were not bottomed due to the depth of the trench. The highest burial discovered in Trench 1 was at 18.91m AOD, 1.11m below existing ground level. Others were found at 18.55m and 18.13m AOD. Within Trench 2 two burials were found lying at 18.43m (1.54m below existing ground level) and 18.28m AOD. From augering burials are known to exist down to at least 17.65m AOD or 2.35m below existing ground level (150mm above the base of grave 1/13).

As is usual with graveyards within urban locations the graveyard has been used intensely with many intercutting graves. Two distinct orientations are apparent from the limited window afforded by these two trenches. The earlier orientation is due east west while the later is more WNW ESE.

The burials in Trench 1 were sealed by a layer of compacted gravelly material, from which human bone and a sherd of 19th-century pottery were recovered. This would appear to represent a clearing phase of the graveyard.

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APPENDIX 1 – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Topsoil	Friable, dark brown grey sandy silt. 5% Gravel.	0.49m	1.80m	3m	None	Topsoil	
1/02	Subsoil	Medium compaction, dark brown grey humic sandy silt, 4% peagrit.	0.22m	1.80m	3m	Pot	Subsoil	19 th C
1/03	Natural	Moderately compact, orangy yellow medium, 10% small gravel.	0.05m	1.80m	3m	None	Natural	
1/04	Fill	Friable, dark brown grey silty sand. Peagrit 8 – 10%.	0.40m	0.50m	1.80m	Pot	Fill of grave 1/06. Not fully excavated	Post-Romano-British
1/05	Grave soil	Loose, orange yellow silty sand. Peagrit 10%.	0.24m	0.50m	0.38m	None	Grave soil, fill of 1/06.	
1/06	Cut	1 corner visible, near vertical sides. East – West orientation	0.40m	0.50m	0.40m	None	Cut of grave. Not fully excavated	
1/07	Fill	Friable, mid to dark grey brown silty sand.	0.40m	0.44m	1.53m	None	Fill of grave 1/08	
1/08	Cut	1 corner visible, near vertical sides. East – West orientation	0.40m	0.44m	1.53m	None	Cut of grave	
1/09	Fill	Friable, mid to dark grey brown silty sand	1.04m	0.72m	1.80m	None	Fill of grave 1/10	
1/10	Cut	Near vertical sides, not fully excavated. East – West orientation	1.20m	0.72m	1.80m	None	Cut of grave	
1/11	Grave soil	Loose, orange yellow silty sand. Peagrit 10%.	1.20m	0.30m	1.80m	None	Grave soil	
1/12	Fill	Friable, mid to dark grey brown silty sand.	1.20m	0.66m	1.80m	None	Fill of grave 1/13	
1/13	Cut	Near vertical sides, not fully excavated. East – West orientation	1.20m	0.66m	1.80m	None	Cut of grave	
1/14	Cut	Near vertical sides, flat bottom. East – West orientation	0.70m	0.64m		None	Cut of grave. Only visible in section	
1/15	Fill	Friable, mid to dark grey brown silty sand.	0.70m	0.64m		None	Fill of grave 1/14	
1/16	Fill	Friable, mid to dark grey brown silty sand	0.24m	0.36m		None	Fill of grace 1/17	
1/17	Cut	Near vertical sides, flat bottom. EW orientation	0.24m	0.36m		None	Cut of grave	
SK 1	Skeleton	Partial skull visible, positioned east – west				None	Partial Skeleton	

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
SK 2	Skeleton	Vertebrae, hipbone and metacarpals present				None	Partial Skeleton	
SK 3	Skeleton	Pelvis and tibia present				None	Partial Skeleton	
Trench 2								
2/01	Topsoil	Friable, dark brown grey sandy silt. 5% Gravel.	0.48m	2m	3m	Pot	Topsoil	M 16 th C+
2/02	Natural	Moderately compact, orange yellow, 10% small gravel.	0.02m	2m	1m	None	Natural	
2/03	Grave soil	Loose, orange yellow silty sand. Peagrit 10%.	1.08m	0.78m	0.62m	None	Grave soil	
2/04	Cut	Near vertical sides, orientated east - west	1.15m	0.28m	1.20m	None	Cut of grave	
2/05	Fill	Friable, dark brown grey silty sand. Peagrit 8 – 10%	1.15m	0.28m	1.20m	Pot	Fill of grave 2/04	M 13 th C+
2/06	Cut	Near vertical sides, orientated east - west	1.02m	0.78m	1.48m	None	Cut of grave	
2/07	Fill	Friable, dark brown grey silty sand. Peagrit 10%	1.02m	0.78m	1.48m	None	Fill of grave 2/06	
2/08	Cut	Near vertical sides, orientated east - west	1.10m	0.40m	0.68m	None	Cut of grave	
2/09	Fill	Friable, dark brown grey silty sand. Peagrit 15%	1.10m	0.40m	0.68m	None	Fill of grave 2/08	
2/10	Grave soil	Loose, orange yellow silty sand. Peagrit 10%.	1.15m	2m	1.10m	None	Grave soil	
2/11	Fill	Friable, dark brown grey silty sand. Peagrit 5%	0.86m	0.60m	1.58m	Pot	Fill of grave 2/12	Post-Romano-British
2/12	Cut	Near vertical sides, orientated east - west	0.86m	0.60m	1.58m	None	Cut of grave	
2/13	Fill	Moderately compact, dark grey brown sandy silt. Peagrit 5 – 8%	1m	0.98m		None	Fill of grave 2/14	
2/14	Cut	Near vertical sides, orientated east – west, flat bottom.	1m	0.98m		None	Cut of grave	
SK 4	Skeleton	Partial skull, orientated east - west				None	Skeleton	
SK 5	Skeleton	Vertebrae, humerus, radius, femur and pelvis present.				None	Skeleton	