

Chapel of St Michael Rycote, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

NGR SP 667 047

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

March 1995

**RYCOTE, CHAPEL OF ST MICHAEL
PARISH OF GREAT HASELEY, OXFORDSHIRE
NGR SP 667047
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief during March 1995 at Rycote Chapel. The chapel stands within the grounds of Rycote Park in the parish of Great Haseley [Fig. 1]. A drainage trench was excavated to the north of the chapel, and new drainpipes installed, in order to counteract the damaging effects of damp to the walls of the chapel. The excavation of the trench was carried out by Mr. C. Hawkins of Brize Norton, Oxon., under the supervision of the OAU.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Rycote Chapel was constructed in 1449 by Sir Richard Quatremaine of Rycote and his wife Sybil. The building was the domestic chapel to Rycote Park, adjacent, and was endowed as a chapel for three priests in the reign of Henry VI. Rycote Chapel remains in the care of English Heritage. The building is important because it is entirely of one build and unaltered.

The chapel consists of chancel and nave under one roof, and a three-stage west tower. Buttresses placed at regular intervals around the church appear integral to the original building design.

The roof of the chapel was re-tiled during the 1960's by the Department of the Environment - the present roof is covered with red tile.

RESULTS

The excavated drainage trench [Fig. 2] was 3m long, 0.25 m wide and c. 0.30 m deep. The trench ran from a buttress in the N wall of the chapel [c. 1.60 m from the N door] into the chapel grounds. The trench was aligned NW-SE. The earliest deposit [2] found at the base of the trench was a mixed layer of sand and loam containing fragments grey shelly limestone roofing tile. This layer butted the wall [and buttress 4] of the chapel, and was sealed by the topsoil. Topsoil [1] was a dark brown clay loam, containing red tile fragments, and was 0.22 m thick.

The present path [3] was set into the topsoil. The path consisted of pinkish-yellow sandy gravel which lay between parallel wooden kerbs. No archaeological features were present in the trench, and no pottery was recovered from the excavated deposits. Bone, human or animal, was not present.

The effects of the damp on the chapel were apparent. In addition to several patches of moss on the walls, all of the buttresses show signs of decay [see Fig. 2]. Substantial cracks in the buttresses were observed: some of the cracks continued to ground level.

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation was limited in nature. The presence of roofing material in layers 1 and 2 probably dates to the re-roofing of the chapel in the 1960's. The limestone tile fragments must have come from the original roof construction, the red tile fragments from cast-offs during the re-roofing.

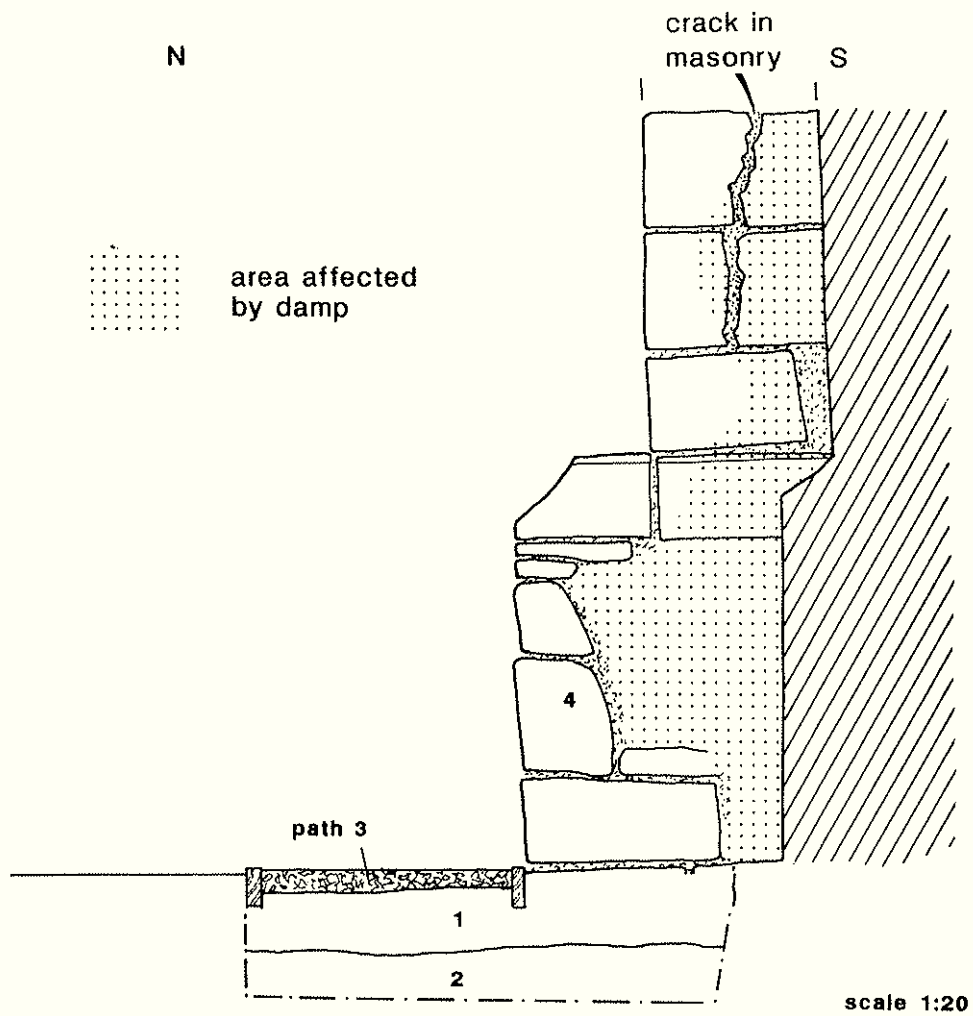
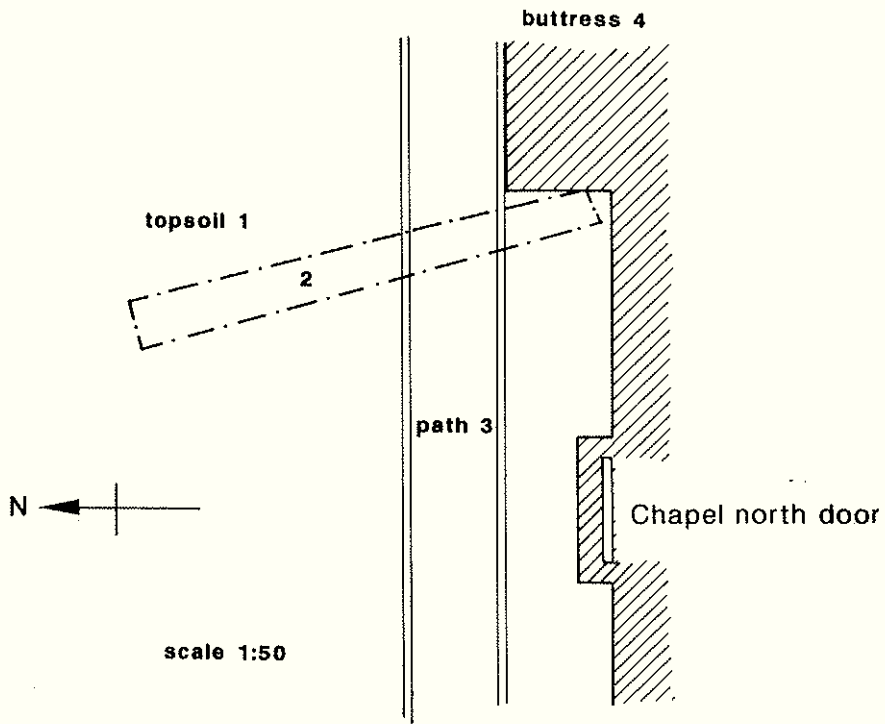
Excavations in churchyards often turn up disturbed human remains. That none were found during this excavation might be accounted for by the fact that of five headstones observed in the chapel grounds, all were standing to the south of the chapel. It is probable that burials were not interred to the north of this chapel.

J.Hiller
Oxford Archaeological Unit
March, 1995

Reference: Pevsnor, N. and Sherwood, J. Oxfordshire, Buildings of England

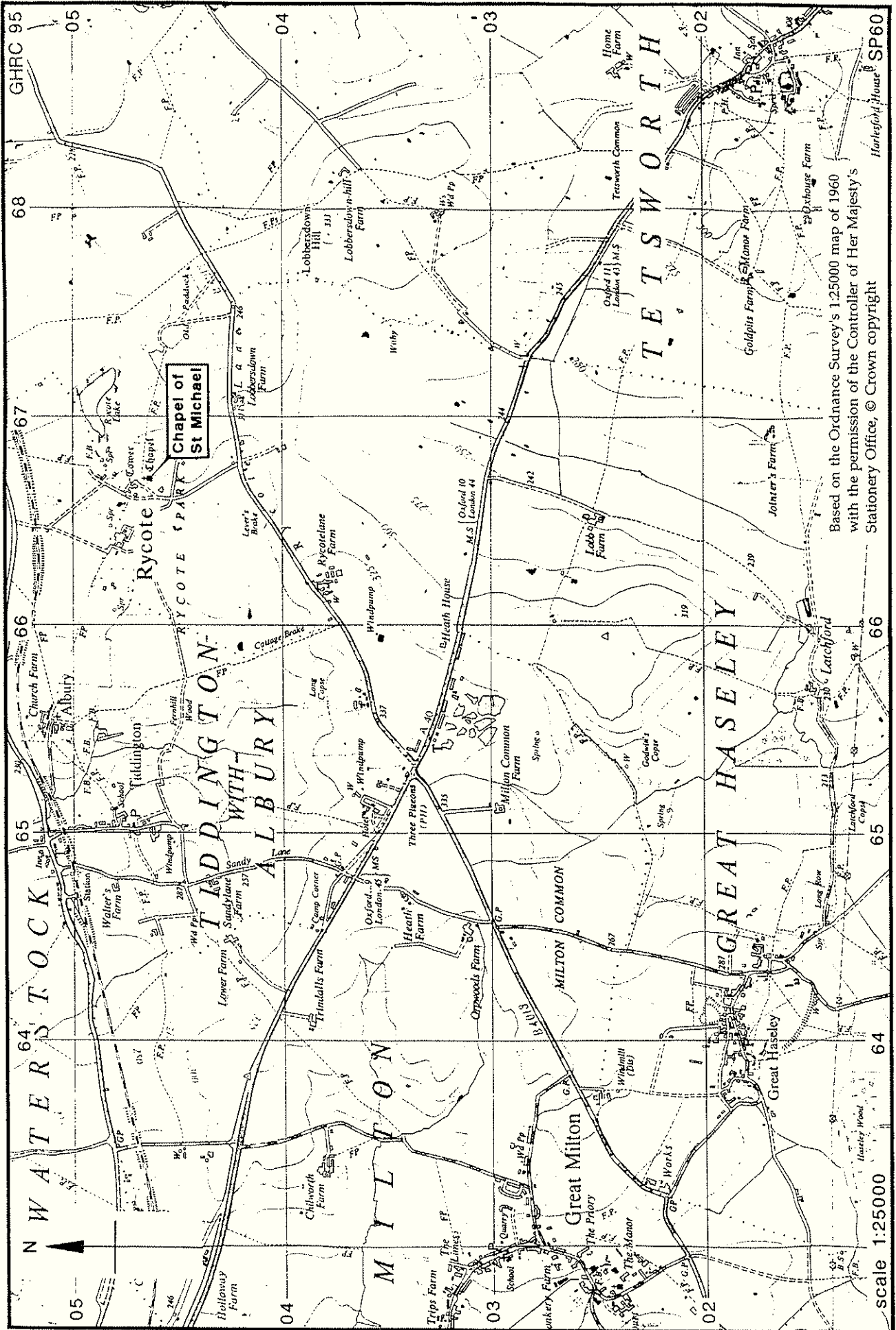
Table of context information

CTX	TYPE	COMMENTS
1	Layer	Topsoil, occ. red tile fragments
2	Layer	Make-up/construction debris, undated
3	Layer	Present gravel path
4	Structure	North wall buttress, next to north door



trench plan and section detail

figure 2



Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:25000 map of 1960 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright

Harleyford House SP60

location of Chapel of St Michael, Rycote

figure 1

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