

EXCAVATION AT ST LAURENCE'S MEETING ROOM, MARKET SQUARE, WINSLOW

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with a contribution by
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Excavation at St Laurence's Meeting Room, Market Square, Winslow, revealed activity dating from the Saxon to post-medieval periods. Five late Anglo-Saxon to early medieval burials indicate that the southern boundary of the churchyard was further south than it is today. Two parallel ditches crossing the site were thought to mark the boundaries of properties on the north side of the market square in the medieval period, encroaching on the earlier churchyard. Two burials dating to the late medieval/early post-medieval period suggested that at least part of the site briefly reverted back to use as a cemetery. Post-medieval features in the south-east corner of the site relate to activity predating the Meeting Room, which was built in 1912.

INTRODUCTION

Setting

In April 2010 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC) carried out an excavation at St Laurence's Meeting Room, Market Square, Winslow, in advance of a new extension to St Laurence's Meeting Room. The project was commissioned by Winslow Parochial Church Council, and was carried out according to a brief (Beckley 2010) prepared by Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service, and a project design prepared by ASC (Zeepvat 2010). The findings of the excavation were presented in an excavation report (Summerfield-Hill 2011). The project archive will be deposited at Buckinghamshire County Museum (Acc. No. AYBCM: 2010.197).

The site is located in the historic core of Winslow, on the north side of Market Square, c.35m south of the parish church of St Laurence, at National Grid Reference SP 79639 27620. The excavation area extended over c.60 sq. m. at the rear (north end) of St Laurence's Room, bounded to the west by a footpath leading to the church, and to the north by the churchyard (Fig. 1).

The site lies at an elevation of c.114m AOD. Soils in the site area belong to the Ashley Association, described as "fine loamy over clayey soils

with slowly permeable subsoils, and slight seasonal waterlogging associated with similar but wetter soils, some calcareous and non-calcareous slowly permeable clayey soils" (Soil Survey 1983, 572q). This overlies Weymouth Mudstone, part of the Oxford Clay Formation (BGS, Sheet 219).

Archaeological and Historical Background

Winslow is believed to have its origins in the Saxon period. The earliest documentary reference to the town is to a grant of land in AD792 at Winslow by Offa, King of Mercia, to the monastery of St Albans (Sawyer 1968, no.138; BCC 2012, 26). In the Domesday Survey of 1086 Winslow is entered under the possessions of St Albans Abbey (Morris 1978, section 8.3), but there is no mention of a priest or church at this time.

The Church of St Laurence dates from c.1320, and consists today of a chancel, north chancel aisle, nave, north and south aisles, west tower and south porch. The nave and aisles are constructed of rubble masonry, and the remaining walls of ashlar blocks. The east gable of the nave is of half-timber work. The building was much altered and restored in the 15th and 19th centuries, yet still retains elements dating from the 14th century. The curvilinear boundary on the north and west sides of the churchyard suggests an earlier date of origin, and it

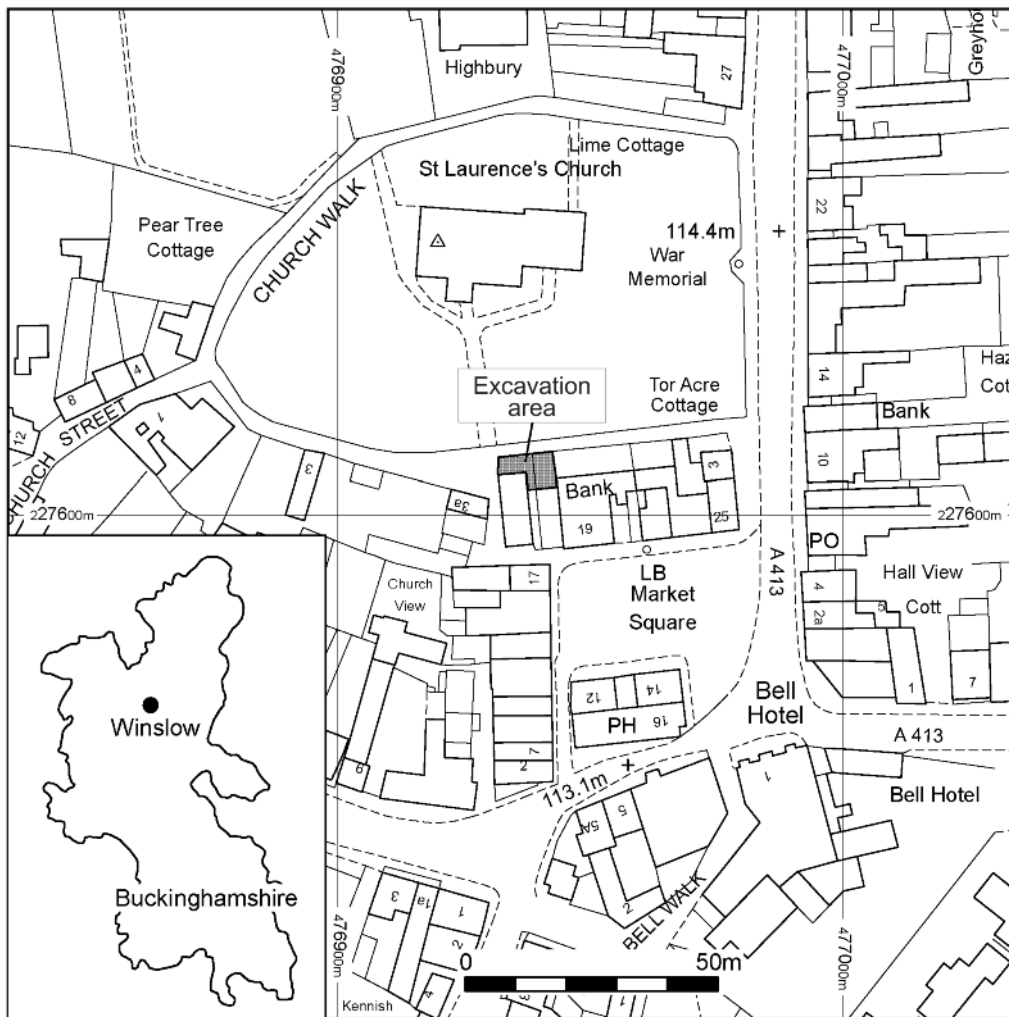


FIGURE 1 Location plan

has been postulated that Winslow was the site of a Saxon minster (Page 1925, 465–470; BCC 2012, 27).

The earliest evidence of Winslow as a nucleated settlement dates from the first half of the 13th century. In 1235 a market was granted by Henry III and laid out to the south of the church (Reed 1979, 112; BCC 2012, 29). At Winslow it appears that buildings associated with the market place encroached on the south side of the churchyard. Evidence for this encroachment was first provided by the discovery of a small number of disarticulated human bones representing more than one

individual, less than ten metres west of the excavation site, south of the present churchyard boundary (Kidd 2002).

The Hundred Rolls of 1279 describe Winslow as a ‘borough’ with ten burgesses (Levett 1938, 182). The burgesses would have held rectangular plots of land set out in a linear pattern, fronting the main street. Burgage plots are present to the east of the church on the High Street, in marked contrast to the more irregular pattern that lies to the south and southwest of the church, in the vicinity of the excavation site.

St Laurence’s Meeting Room was built by

Norman McCorquodale of Winslow Hall and given to the church and people of Winslow in 1912. It is believed that two church cottages were demolished to make way for it. The First Edition Ordnance Survey 25" Sheet for 1899 shows the whole site as being covered by a building or buildings, with the exception of a small garden at the north end.

RESULTS

The excavation uncovered seven articulated/partially articulated Christian burials, a posthole, two ditches, two gullies and a number of undetermined features (Figs 2 & 3).

The following phases of archaeological activity have been identified on the site on the basis of radiocarbon dates obtained from two of the human burials, SK008 and SK052, pottery analysis and stratigraphic evidence.

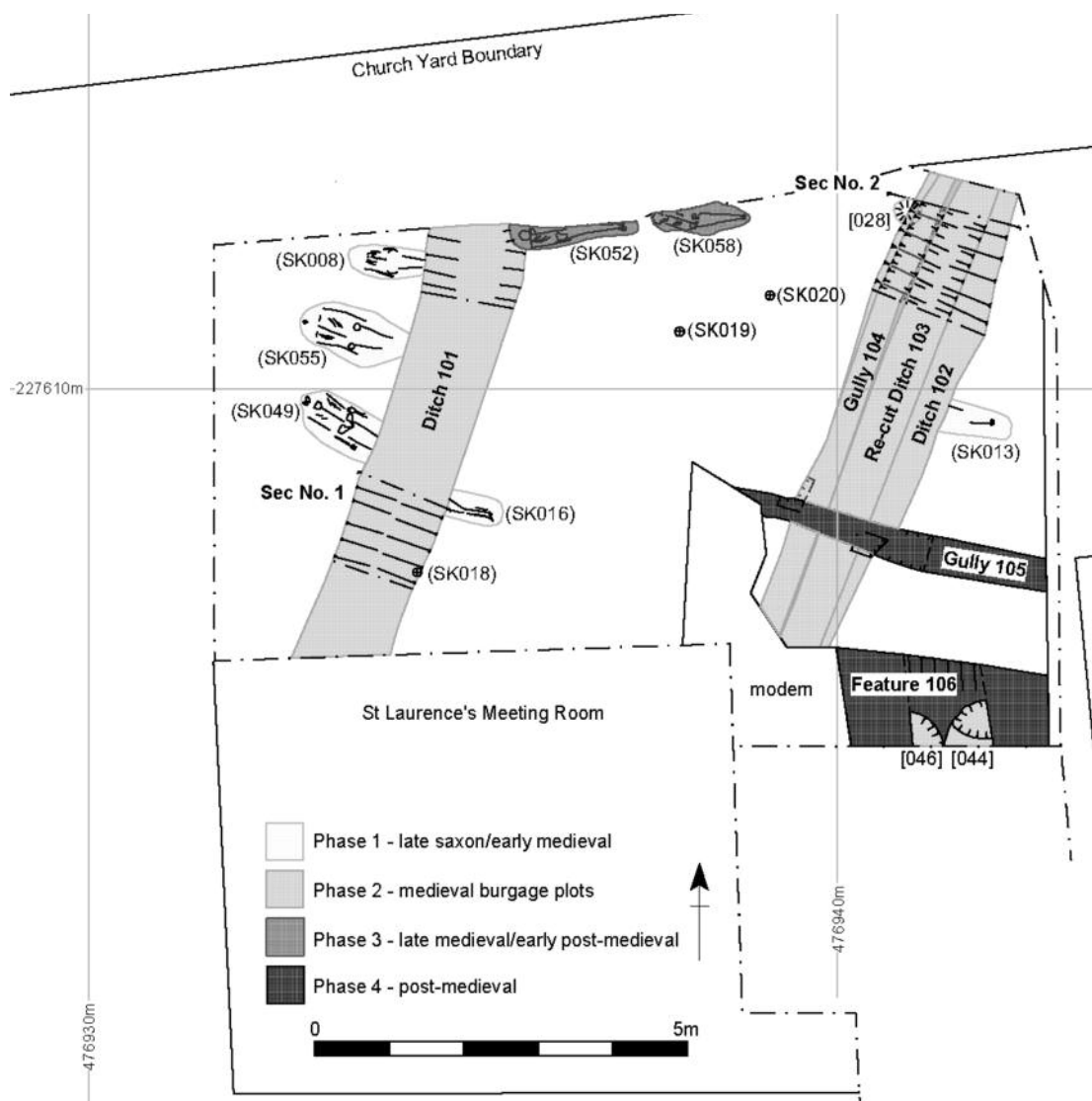


FIGURE 2 Overall plan (scale 1:100)

Phase 1 – Late Saxon/Early Medieval

The first phase of activity on the site was represented by five human burials (SK008, SK055, SK049, SK016 and SK013), and posthole 028. The burials were laid out in an extended, supine position orientated roughly east-west, with the head to the west, and comprised two older adult males, one older adult female and two adults, sex unknown. Four of the burials (SK008, SK055, SK049 and SK016) were located towards the western end of the site, with a single burial (SK013) towards the eastern end. Burial SK008 was radiocarbon dated to 1005 ± 40 BP, calibrated to give a 95.4% probability of AD 900–1160. Posthole 028, a sub-circular, U-shaped cut that measured $c.0.34 \times 0.38$ m in diameter and $c.0.10$ m in deep, was located at the north-eastern corner of the site. It was truncated by ditch 102 and gully 104, both assigned to Phase 2.

Human skull fragments (SK018, SK019 & SK020), and a moderate amount of disarticulated human remains were also found. Due to their disturbed nature the remains could not be dated but are likely associated with either Phase 1 or Phase 3.

Phase 2 – Medieval Encroachment

During Phase 2 the site was subdivided by the cutting of parallel ditches 101 and 102, $c.5$ m apart on a NNE-SSW alignment. Both ditches were cut through Phase 1 burials. Also assigned to this phase were pits 044 and 046, located to the east of Ditch 102 (Fig. 3). These features appear to indicate encroachment on the south side of the churchyard by properties established along the north side of the Market Place, presumably following its establishment in 1235.

Ditch 101 was towards the western side of the site and had a V-shaped profile measuring $c.1.38$ m wide and 1.40 m deep. Ditch 102 was towards the eastern side of the site and had a V-shaped profile that measured $c.1.6$ m wide and 0.66 m deep. Sherds of mid-14th to early 16th century reduced ware pottery, and cattle bone, were recovered from ditch 101, and sheep bones were recovered from ditch 102. Ditch 101 cut Phase 1 burials SK008, SK055, SK049 & SK016 (Fig. 4). Ditch 102 cut Phase 1 burial SK013, and posthole 028.

Ditch 102 was later recut (ditch 103) on the same alignment, indicating continuing use of the boundary (Fig. 3). Ditch 103 had a U-shaped profile and measured $c.1.0$ m wide and $c.0.43$ m

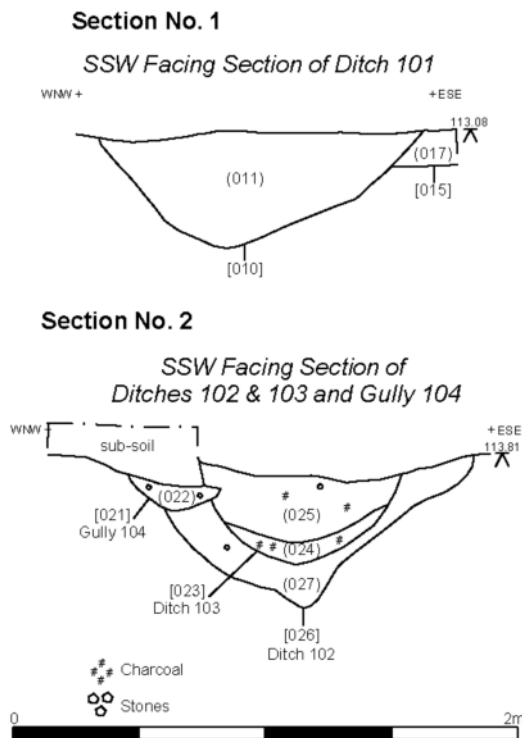


FIGURE 3 Section drawings (scale 1:30)

deep. It contained cattle bone, and was later replaced by gully 104, and cut by gully 105. Gully 104 (Fig. 3) follows the same alignment as the recut ditch, and may represent a later re-establishment of that boundary. Gully 104 was also U-shaped and measured $c.0.30$ m wide and $c.0.1$ m deep, it contained cattle bone but no datable finds. Gully 104 also cut Phase 1 posthole 028, and was cut by Phase 4 gully 105.

Pits 044 & 046 were located at the south-eastern corner of the site, and were truncated by post-medieval feature 106. Pit 044 had a U-shaped profile $c.0.9$ m wide and $c.0.3$ m deep, and contained no finds. Pit 046 was also U-shaped in profile and measured $c.1.4$ m wide and $c.0.42$ m deep. It contained sherds of mid 14th to early 16th century reduced ware pottery, cattle and sheep bone, and tile.

Phase 3 – Late Medieval/Early Post-Medieval

During phase 3 it appears that at least part of the site reverted back to being used as a cemetery. This



FIGURE 4 SK008 cut by ditch 101 (scale 2m)

phase was represented by two burials located at the northern end of the site (Fig. 5). Each was laid out in an extended, supine position orientated east-west, with the head to the west. The burials comprised one older adult female (SK052) and one older child, sex unknown (SK058). Burial SK052 was radiocarbon dated to 445 ± 40 BP, calibrated to give a 95.4% probability of AD 1400–1620. Burial SK052 cut ditch 101. SK058 has been assigned to this phase as the burial was in close proximity to SK052, at a similar level and on the same alignment.



FIGURE 5 SK058 (scale 1m)

Phase 4 – Post-Medieval

Phase 4 was represented by ditch 106 and gully 105, both of which orientated ESE-WNW. Ditch 106 was located at the southern end of the site: it

was c.0.43m deep and contained one sherd of 13th to 17th-century Brill/Boarstall ware pottery, cattle and chicken? bone, oyster shell and tile. Gully 105 was north of feature 106. It had a U-shaped profile, measured c.0.53m wide and c.0.07m deep, and contained no finds. It cut ditches 102 and 103 and gully 104.

THE ARTEFACTS

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 9 sherds with a total weight of 122g. It was all medieval, and indicates that there was activity at the site from the 13th to 14th centuries, and probably throughout the late medieval period. The assemblage was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard & Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat *et al.* 1994), as follows:

MS6: *Potterspury Ware*, 1250–1600. 2 sherds, 10g.
MS9: *Brill/Boarstall Ware*. 1200–?1600. 2 sherds, 331g.

TLMS3: *Late Medieval Reduced Ware*. Mid-14th to early 16th century. 4 sherds, 77g.

In addition, the following ware, not included in the Milton Keynes type-series, was noted:

OXAC: *Cotswold-type ware*: 11th to mid-13th century. Oxfordshire fabric OXAC (Mellor 1994). Abundant oolitic limestone with some rounded ironstone and occasional quartz. Glazed tripod. 1 sherd, 4g.

The assemblage consists of types which are well-known in west Buckinghamshire and north Oxfordshire. The sherds are all fairly large and in very good condition, and appear generally reliably stratified. Most are bodysherds from jars or jugs, and a single rimsherd from a jar was also present. The assemblage appears entirely of a domestic nature.

Buckle

Towards the southeast of the site, in the vicinity of feature 106, a medieval cast copper alloy buckle, with its pin, was found within the subsoil (003; Fig. 6). The buckle measured 36mm in length, width across frame 21.5mm, width across ends of forked spacers 14mm, thickness across frame 1.5mm,

thickness across forked spacers 1.9mm. The buckle was dated to *c.*AD 1350–1450. The Portable Antiquities Scheme describes the same type of buckle found at Covington, Cambridgeshire as an ‘*oval single loop buckle with bevelled edges, lipped outer edge and integral forked spacer ...dark grey-green patina*’ (www.finds.org.uk/database/search/results/old_findID/DENO-B71332/).

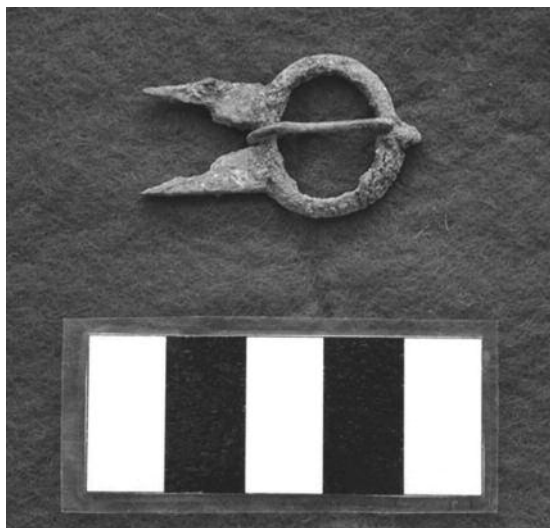


FIGURE 6 Medieval cast copper alloy buckle
(scale 50mm)

Animal Bone & Oyster Shells

The animal bone assemblage consisted of 35 fragments (1186g), comprising sheep, cattle and possibly chicken. It was recovered from ditches 101–103, ditch 106, gully 104, pit 046, and a general unstratified context. As the site is on the Market Place the animal remains are likely to represent domestic refuse.

Oyster shells were recovered from feature 106 and an unstratified context. These are ubiquitous on medieval sites, and are associated with domestic consumption.

HUMAN REMAINS

Introduction

Seven articulated/partially articulated human burials were recovered during the excavation, as well as three incomplete skulls and a moderate

level of disarticulated human remains. The articulated burials were aligned east-west, suggesting Christian burials, with grave cuts visible. There was no evidence for coffin fittings.

The assessment of the sex of individuals was based, where possible, on the morphological characteristics of the skull and pelvic regions (Schwartz 1995, 280–281; Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994; Bass 2005). Individuals that could not be confidently sexed, due to a lack of preservation or immaturity, are termed ‘Sex Unknown’. The assessment of the age of the individuals was based primarily on epiphyseal fusion of the long bones (Schwartz 1995, 185–222; Bass 2005), and where possible the auricular surface (Lovejoy *et al.* 1985), dental development (Ubelaker 1978), and molar wear (Brothwell 1965). Stature was also estimated, depending on the level of preservation, using the femur/stature ratio (Fieldesman *et al.* 1990).

The articulated burials and three incomplete skulls consisted of:

- 2 × Older Adult Males (35-50 yrs old)
- 2 × Older Adult Females (35-50 yrs old)
- 3 × Adults/ Sex Unknown (18+ yrs old)
- 1 × Older Child/Sex Unknown (6-11 yrs old)
- 2 × Age/Sex Unknown

Preservation and Completeness

Tree roots were present in some parts of the site, causing fragmentation and surface degradation of the human remains. Burials SK016, SK049, SK055 & SK008 were cut by ditch 101 and burial SK013 was cut by ditch 102, reducing their level of completeness.

The articulated burials consisted of two that were 80-85% complete (SK052 & SK058), three between 60-70% complete (SK008, SK055 & SK008), one <25% complete (SK016), and one that was <10% complete (SK013).

Pathology

The identification of any abnormalities present on the bone/teeth of the articulated individuals was assessed so as to build up a fuller picture of their health. However, owing to poor preservation it was difficult to fully assess whether pathology was present or not.

Common forms of pathology associated with dentition are often preserved in the archaeological record. Two forms are present within the sample:

- 1) Ante-mortem tooth loss (AMTL) whereby the loss of the tooth occurs during lifetime, and is linked to the age, diet and oral hygiene of the individual (Roberts & Manchester 2005, 73–74).
- 2) Dental caries occur in the form of small opaque spots on the teeth surface or as cavities. An infectious and transmissible disease caused by the fermentation of food by bacteria, present on the teeth as plaque (Roberts & Manchester 2005, 65–71).

Anti-mortem-tooth-loss (AMTL) was present on the upper and lower dentition of SK052, an older adult female. It had occurred a considerable amount of time before death, as the bone was fully healed and smooth. Two small round caries, 1mm in diameter, were also present on the buccal side of the LM³ of SK052 (outer surface of left upper third molar).

No further pathologies were observed on the assemblage.

Stature Estimation

Burial SK008, an older adult female, was estimated at 151–152cm (c.4' 11½") in height, based on both the right and left femur. Burial SK049, an older adult male, was estimated at 182cm (c.5' 11") in height, based on the right femur only, owing to poor preservation.

Conclusion

No evidence for the causes of death was present on the skeletons. This is common, as disease and internal organ failure will often leave no skeletal trace. From such a small sample, with an absence of complete burials, no detailed statistical analysis can be carried out, and conclusions as to the demography and health of the population cannot be arrived at. All that can be stated is that there was evidence of dental pathology in the form of AMTL and tooth caries, as is common today.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The excavation revealed two distinct phases of Christian burials and a moderate amount of undated disarticulated human remains. A series of NNE-SSW ditch alignments, one of which with successive re-cuts, along with a number of gullies, postholes and undetermined features were also excavated.

The earliest phase of activity identified on the site was associated with five human burials dated to the late Saxon/early medieval period. At this time the site appears to have been within the churchyard, with the southern churchyard boundary some distance to the south of its present location. The undated burials found to the west of the site in 2002 may also have been within the churchyard, though it is possible that they may be contemporary with the phase 3 burials on the site (below).

The posthole associated with phase 1 may have been linked to agricultural activity or the pasturing of animals in churchyards, which was often practised (Morris 1989, 326). During the medieval period churchyards were regarded as places of social activity and could be used as a public meeting place or market, which may have entailed the occasional erection of structures for functions (Rodwell 2005, 167).

The second phase of activity on the site comprises the excavation of parallel ditches 101 and 102, and features 044 and 046. The ditches appear to represent encroachment on the churchyard of properties laid out along the north side of the Market Place, following the grant of a market charter for Winslow by Edward II in 1235. The width between the ditches, 5m, equates to the medieval *perch*, 16½ft. A width of 2–3 perches was the norm (Hindle 1990, 52–55) for a burgrave plot, so it is possible that one of these ditches marks a subdivision of a wider plot. The subdivision of land plots was common and by 1342 the Winslow Court Rolls mention such a division (www.winslow-history.org.uk). The ditches are likely to have been in use for some time as ditch 102 was recut, ditch 103, and again by gully 104 before the boundaries became redundant. Two pits, 044 and 046, are also assigned to this phase, though dating evidence is sparse. Pit 046 contained a single sherd of mid 14th to early 16th century pottery. The function of these features remains undetermined, although it is typical to find pits at the rear of most medieval plots.

Phase 3 was represented by two burials (SK052 & SK058) interred near the northern boundary of the site on a different alignment to the earlier burials, one of them cutting the infilled ditch 101. Burial SK052 produced a radiocarbon date of AD 1400–1620. It is unclear why these individuals were buried on land that had apparently passed out

of church use. The site revealed little evidence for urban medieval ‘backyard’ activity, and it is possible that the church may have reasserted its ownership of this former churchyard area, for a short period at least. Alternatively, it may have served as an unconsecrated burial area. It was common in the medieval period for suicides, excommunicates, felons and those who had generally not lived in communion with the church to be barred from burial on consecrated ground (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03071a.htm>; Puckle 1926).

The final phase of activity on the site is represented by two features towards its southern end, ditch 106 and gully 105. Dating evidence is limited for this phase, as only one sherd of 13th to 17th century Brill/Boarstall ware was recovered from feature 106, and gully 105 contained no finds. However, based on their relationships with earlier dated features, it is likely that these features were post-medieval in date. It is possible that they relate to the cottages that stood on the site prior to the construction of St Laurence’s Meeting Room.

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Internet Resources

- The Portable Antiquities Scheme: http://www.finds.org.uk/database/search/results/old_findID/DEN-O-B71332/
- <http://www.winslow-history.org.uk>
- <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03071a.htm>