**Archaeology at All Saints** October 2013   
 When the project was first proposed Andrew was asked what were the foreseeable archaeological implications.  He gave the 4 most likely things we might encounter:  1. the Saxon church - if we had found that it would have been hugely more serious than the unmarked graves we have found; 2. that the mound might have been part of the Civil War Defences - again, hugely serious in terms of history and archaeology; 3. unknown graves - nothing we can do about it, because survival of skeletons for longer than c70 years is dependent on soil conditions and so cannot be planned for; 4. very few burials probably of paupers - which was indicated by the test pits.  The graves that have been found appear to be individual burials, not group graves.    
   
 Written evidence - the only written evidence we have comes from the burial registers, which do not give grave locations from before the later part of the 19th century, and then only for those with headstones or known family plots.   
   
  There was a statement made from the floor that 'it is a well-known fact that local villages bury their dead on the north side of churches'.  This is anecdotal evidence from a few churches in highly populated urban areas such as London.  There is no evidence that All Saints was ever used in this way by any of the local villages apart from Littleworth, who had the use of the Littleworth Aisle on the south side. There is no written evidence of their burials but it is highly unlikely that they would have been buried on the north side, which was regarded as a place for paupers, given that they had a south side chapel.   
   
  There was also a statement about being able to 'estimate the number of burials in the churchyard by its height above the road.' Yes, we can estimate the number of burials that will have taken place in All Saints - the church is the only parish church for a town of c2-3000 inhabitants x 30 years per generation x number of generations x 850 years.  BUT, survival of skeletal material is totally dependent on chance and soil conditions.  In densely populated urban areas most church yards were cleared every 3-4 generations and the surviving skeletal remains placed together in a charnal house.  All Saints has never been cleared in this way, implying that the population density was not so great that the churchyard was ever considered full enough to need clearing.  This is borne out by the fact that the graves on the north side were totally lost - no surface memorials, nor any reuse of the area at the height of the population growth at the end of the 19th century.  
   
 Group graves tend to occur either as family mausolea or as part of a significant event such as a war or an epidemic. Mass burial is an extreme act which is avoided as much as possible within English culture and consequently is relatively rare in the archaeological record. Until the bones are analysed they cannot be assigned to any particular period or event. Excavation has indicated that these are individual burials, not a group grave  
   
 Neither archaeology nor history are exact sciences.  All of these questions were considered.  The earliest investigations were looking for the Saxon church, the origin of the mound, and the possibility of unknown burials. Given that skeletal survival from the date suggested for these remains is pure chance in the first place it was extremely unlucky that the test pits did not reveal the full extent of the finds. But every archaeological dig is an individual case study - you cannot say exactly what you will find on any individual site.  Once they had been found, it is a legal as well as a moral requirement that they were excavated with all due care and reverence (rather than just quietly bull-dozed away which has been done in some places when no one was looking!).  In terms of the building project, they did investgate whether the building could be built on piles.  But the ground slopes significantly, and as John Chamberlain pointed out, any useable ramp would have to start at the crossing.  The additional engineering costs might well have equalled the amount we have had to pay for the archaeology.  On the whole, although All Saints has been handed a raw deal in terms of money and fundraising, Faringdon has been given back a huge chunk of its history (once the analysis is done) and these lost people will receive a reverent reburial in a marked grave that will never be lost again.  
  
I think that about 340 bodies (skeletons) were found. They will be re-interred in Church Lane Cemetery, as befits members of the Christian community.