

St Michael's Church, Stoke, Coventry

Archaeological Watching Brief



understanding heritage matters

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1375
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*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: St Michael's Church, Stoke, Coventry

Commissioned by: St Michael's Church PCC

Project Report No. 1375

Site Code: SMS12

NGR: SP 3580 7945

Planning Reference: N/A

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at St Michael's Church, Stoke, Coventry, during groundworks within the church for the replacement of pews. The remains of the former north wall of the church were uncovered, along with stone slabs of an earlier floor than the Victorian tiled floor or wooden floor. Among the finds recovered during cleaning the area were two fragments of medieval floor tile, suggesting the medieval church had a tiled floor, and a fragment of human bone, which was reburied on site.

1 Introduction

1.1 Faculty has been granted by Coventry Diocese for the replacement of pews and floorboards at St Michael's Church, Stoke, Coventry. A condition of Faculty required the applicant to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development. A concrete sub-floor was known to be present below the southern part of the nave and observation and recording was not required here. However, it was believed possible that archaeological remains, including earlier floors and/or intra-mural burials, may be present in the northern area.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of the removal of floor boards and recording the material below them, was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in November 2012 and this report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored with Archaeology Warwickshire under the site code SMS12, until deposition at The Herbert, Coventry.

2 Location

2.1 The development site is located in Stoke, to the east of Coventry city centre, at map reference SP 3580 7945.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation (British Geological Survey 1994).

3 Methodology

3.1 The watching brief was designed to observe any groundworks associated with the development and record as far as possible, the nature of the archaeological resource on the site. Any archaeological remains found are to be left *in situ* and are to be preserved where possible and avoid impact on surviving remains.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of early map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. Fieldwork involved an archaeologist being present during appropriate groundworks.

4 Archaeological and historical background

4.1 The first church on site is believed to have been constructed in the 12th century, c.1100. Further additions were made in the 14th and 15th centuries, with the west tower, nave bays and south aisle constructed in this period. The south aisle is in red sandstone and dates to c.1320-30, with one window having intersected and one reticulated tracery (Pevsner and Wedgwood 1966, 280). The North Chapel of the church holds a carved wall monument created in 1722. In 1822 a short north aisle was added, and the arcade replaced the old north wall. In 1860-1861 the church was enlarged by James Murray, in response to the increasing population in the area (MCT 948). Both aisles and nave were rebuilt, doubling in length, and a new chancel was built. Additional works took place in the 20th century. The porch was rebuilt in 1920; in 1930 vestries were added to the north side. In 1950 another programme of building work was undertaken with both north and south aisles extended eastwards and the chancel also extended. During internal alterations in 1992 a vault was discovered during rebuilding of the north aisle floor. The whitewashed vault, still sealed apart from two small openings, did not give any indication who might be buried there, but it is likely to have been someone of some importance (<http://www.stokestmichaels.co.uk/history.html>).

4.2 Stoke was not mentioned in Domesday Book but appears as one of the chapelries granted to Coventry Priory by Ranulf de Gernon in the early 12th century. An archaeological evaluation found the remains of a medieval building dating from the 13th century, possibly the manor house of Stoke Manor (MCT 1067). The possible site of a deserted medieval village lies to the south of the church (MCT 623), and the large medieval open field 'Church Field' lay to the west (MCT 2112). In 1655, Church Field was enclosed and by the 19th century had been divided into several smaller enclosed fields. Sow Road (later Walsgrave Road) is the main road to the south of St Michael's, with the road being marked on a map of 1779 and turnpiked in 1812 (MCT 11971).

4.3 The church is shown on the tithe map of 1842. The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888 names it as St Chad's Church (Fig 2), as does the second edition of 1905 (Fig 3). However, by 1925 the church is named as St Michael's (Ordnance Survey 1925, Fig 4).

4.4 By the late 19th century pockets of housing development had begun in Stoke (Ordnance Survey 1888). Little further development had taken place by the time of the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905, but by 1925 'Middle Stoke' was heavily developed with terraced houses and by 1949 the whole of the area surrounding the church and churchyard had been built up, with the school to the north of the church (Fig 5).

4.5 A series of archaeological evaluations have been conducted in the vicinity of St Michael's church. In 2007 an evaluation and watching brief were undertaken at Stoke Park School and Community college adjacent to the church (ECT 509). This resulted in the possible location of Stoke Manor (MCT 1067). The other archaeological evaluation was undertaken in 2009, with a trial trench dug within the grounds of Stoke Park School, this resulted in the discovery of a 19th century ditch (MCT 2256) and the remains of a 20th century building (MCT 2258).

5 Watching Brief

5.1 The watching brief was conducted during and following the lifting of the floorboards in the western end of the church. Two areas of boarding were removed; one of these (the southern area) was known to have concrete below it and was not of archaeological interest (Fig 6). The northern area was believed to have the remains of a 'lime-ash floor' below the floorboards.

5.2 The floor-boards themselves were modern, and measured 0.12m (5 inches) wide (1). This was an area of 20th-century replacement flooring, much of which was due to be re-used in the new floor. The joists on which they rested (2) measured 90mm x 100mm and significant parts of these were rotten. These joists, and the *ad hoc* joist supports (brick, overlaid with a small piece of roofing felt with a sliver of wood on top – 3; Fig 8) were removed prior to the sub-floor area being cleaned and lowered slightly.

5.3 The subfloor below was cleaned, and in some areas lowered, to enable the new joists to be laid level (Fig 9). The lowest remains uncovered were two areas of red sandstone (11) in the western part of the area examined close to the pier (Figs 7 and 10). This appeared to represent the remains of the 14th-century north wall foundations, and was overlaid by a 80-100mm thick layer of compacted material made up of a mixture of concrete, brick fragments and stone fragments (12).

5.4 The highly compacted material was overlain by c.50mm of less compact reddish brown sand and mortar (7). This was not level and was much higher in the north-west corner and undulating in the south. It seems likely that this represents a 19th-century working surface or debris layer. Layer 7 was overlain by a very loose layer of light reddish brown sand and silt (4). The layer contained many flecks of mortar and this may have been mistaken for a 'lime-ash floor' at some point. The layer contained lots of fragments of 19th-century material, such as pottery, glass, slate, post-medieval roof tile and floor tile, and two fragments of medieval floor tile. One of these fragments was triangular and measured 150mm (long side) x 108mm (short side) x 24mm thick. The dark green surface glaze was very worn. One fragment of human long bone was also disturbed during the work, and was reburied in an area close to the hexagonal pier, where it would not suffer further disturbance.

5.5 Clearance around the western pier uncovered the remains of an 80mm thick flagstone floor (5) that had been covered by layer 7. This had been cut (6) presumably to facilitate the removal of the floor itself, but leaving the floor intact below the pier.

5.6 The hexagonal pier in the north-west part of the area (9) rested on brick footings (10), suggesting these were part of the 1860s rebuild. The Victorian quarry tile floor (8), still intact in places under the carpeted floor, will also date to this time (Fig 11).

6 Conclusions

6.1 This small watching brief has given tantalising glimpses into the early history of St Michael's church. This area of the church, just east of the tower, is likely to have been one of the longest-used areas of the church and indeed, is likely to be in the original 12th-century part. The fragment of human bone attests to burial within the nave, and to burials being disturbed by later works. The earliest evidence for *in situ* material is a small area of red sandstone, seen in two places, and likely to belong to the footings of the 14th-century north wall. This would have matched the red sandstone of the south aisle. Loose fragments of medieval floor tile tell us that some of the floor had decorative tiling, probably laid in the 13th or 14th century. A later phase of flooring, in light-coloured stone slabs, probably belongs to the 1822 development, when the north aisle was constructed. This floor was replaced by a wooden floor below the pews (probably in the 1860s redevelopment), with Victorian tiling of the walkways.

6.2 The material found below the flooring, such as the button, may have found their way there through cracks between the floor boards; other things, such as the slate and glass fragments, are likely to be from episodes of building construction.

Acknowledgements

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Peter Dronfield of St Michael's Church PCC for commissioning the work and the DAC Archaeologist, Jonathan Parkhouse, for approving the WSI.

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Appendices

A List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Floorboards	modern
2	Joists	19thC?
3	Floor board supports	modern
4	Layer of loose material	
5	Stone floor flags	
6	Cut through floor	
7	Layer	
8	Floor tiles	19th century
9	Hexagonal pier	19th century
10	Brick foundation for 9	
11	Red sandstone	remains of wall
12	Compact layer	

B List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>date/comments</i>
4	*Pottery	1	modern glazed ware (MGW)
4	*Glass	2	colourless window glass
4	*Button	1	4-hole bone button
4	*Iron	1	long nail
4	*roof tile	2	post-medieval
4	*slate	1	roof slate fragment
4	*animal bone	2	chicken bone, sheep mandible fragment
4	Floor tile	2	medieval floor tile, one broken fragment with traces of mortar underneath and splashes of brown glaze on surface. One triangular fragment, worn, with green glaze on surface.
4	Human bone	1	long bone shaft (reburied)

*Modern finds discarded, medieval floor tile returned to church. Human bone reburied.

National Heritage List for England Citation

CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL, WALSGRAVE ROAD

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 05-Feb-1955

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 218597

833/18/85 WALSGRAVE ROAD 05-FEB-55 STOKE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL

II*

C14 west bays of nave and south aisle. C14 and C15 west tower. East extension 1860-61 by James Murray, in C14 style. Restored 1894-5. C14 or C15 octagonal font, carved piscina. C18 and early C19 wall tablets. Late medieval sandstone stoup in chancel. Finely carved wall monument of 1722 in north chapel. Early glass in west window, Royal hatchment over north doorway.

Listing NGR: SP3580879459

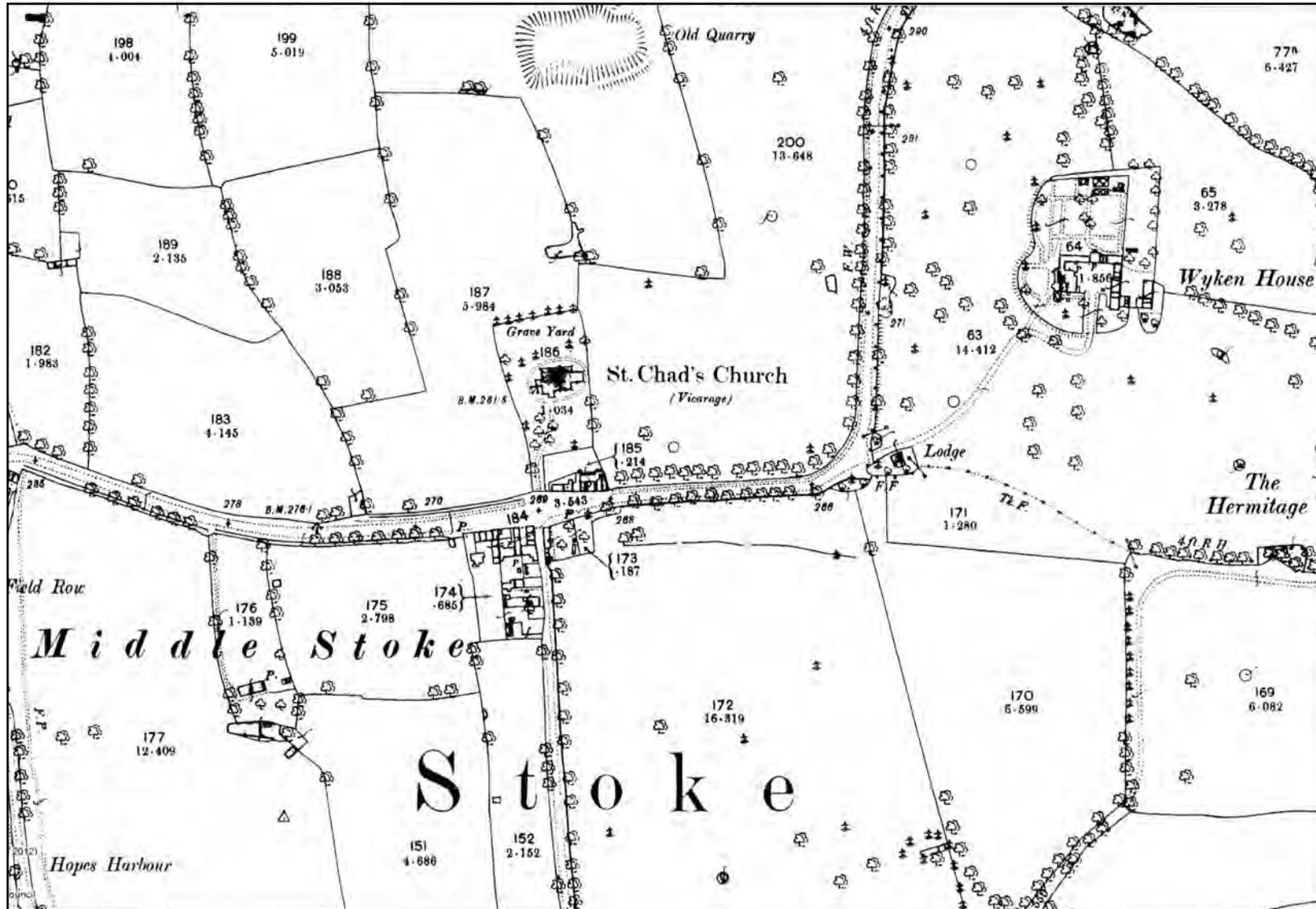


Fig 2: Detail from 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888

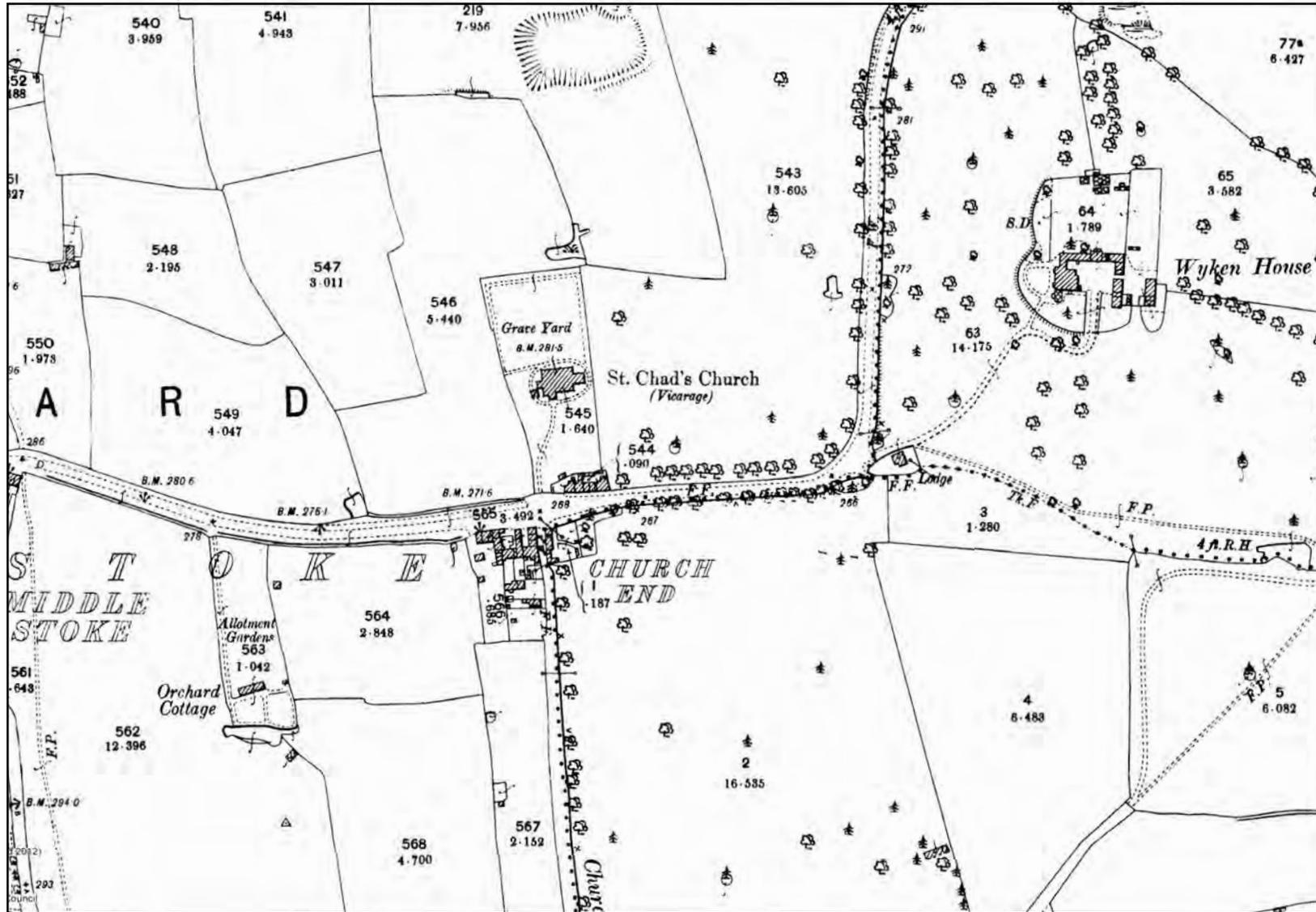


Fig 3: Detail from 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905



Fig 4: Detail from 4th Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1925

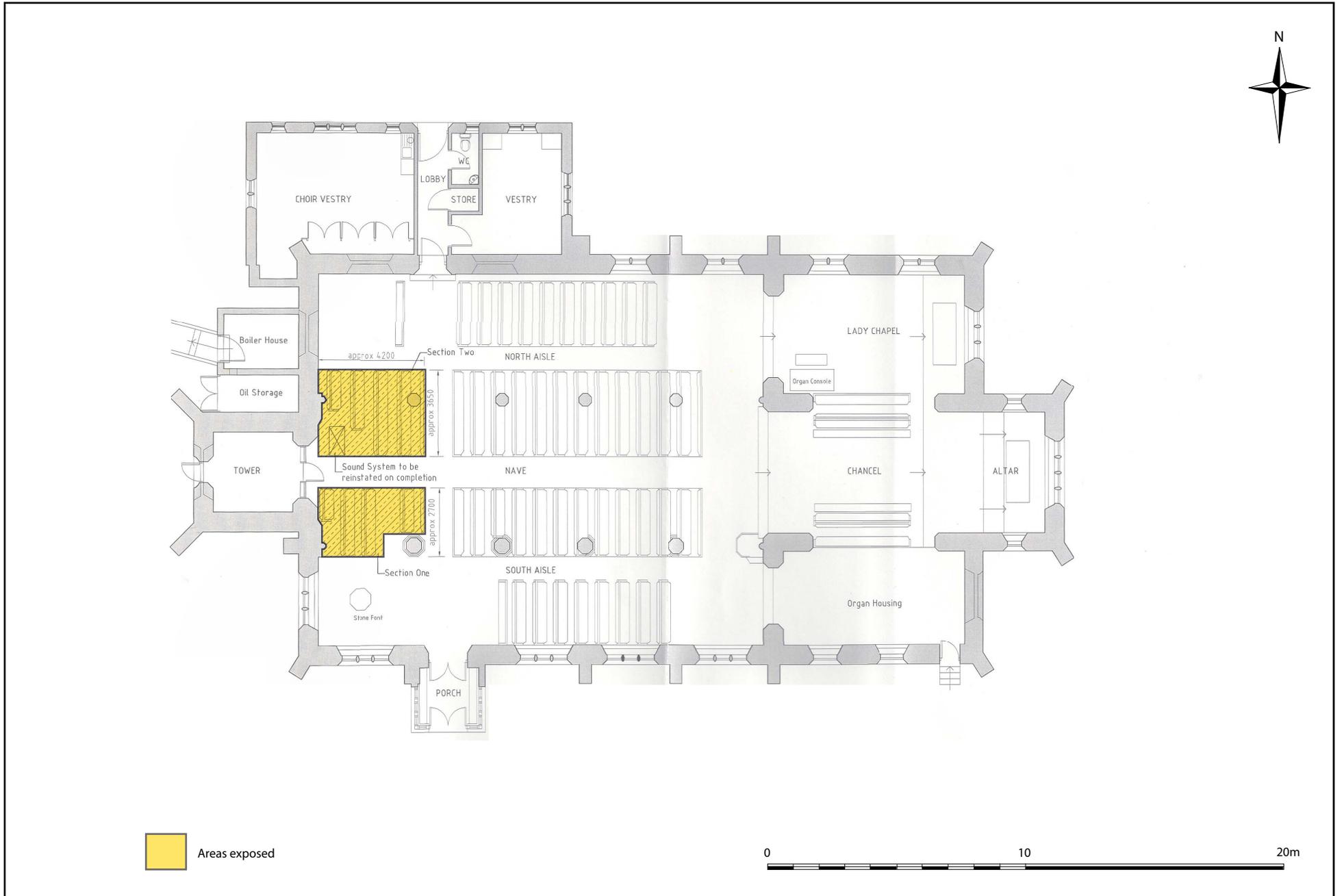


Fig 6: St Michael's Church, areas exposed

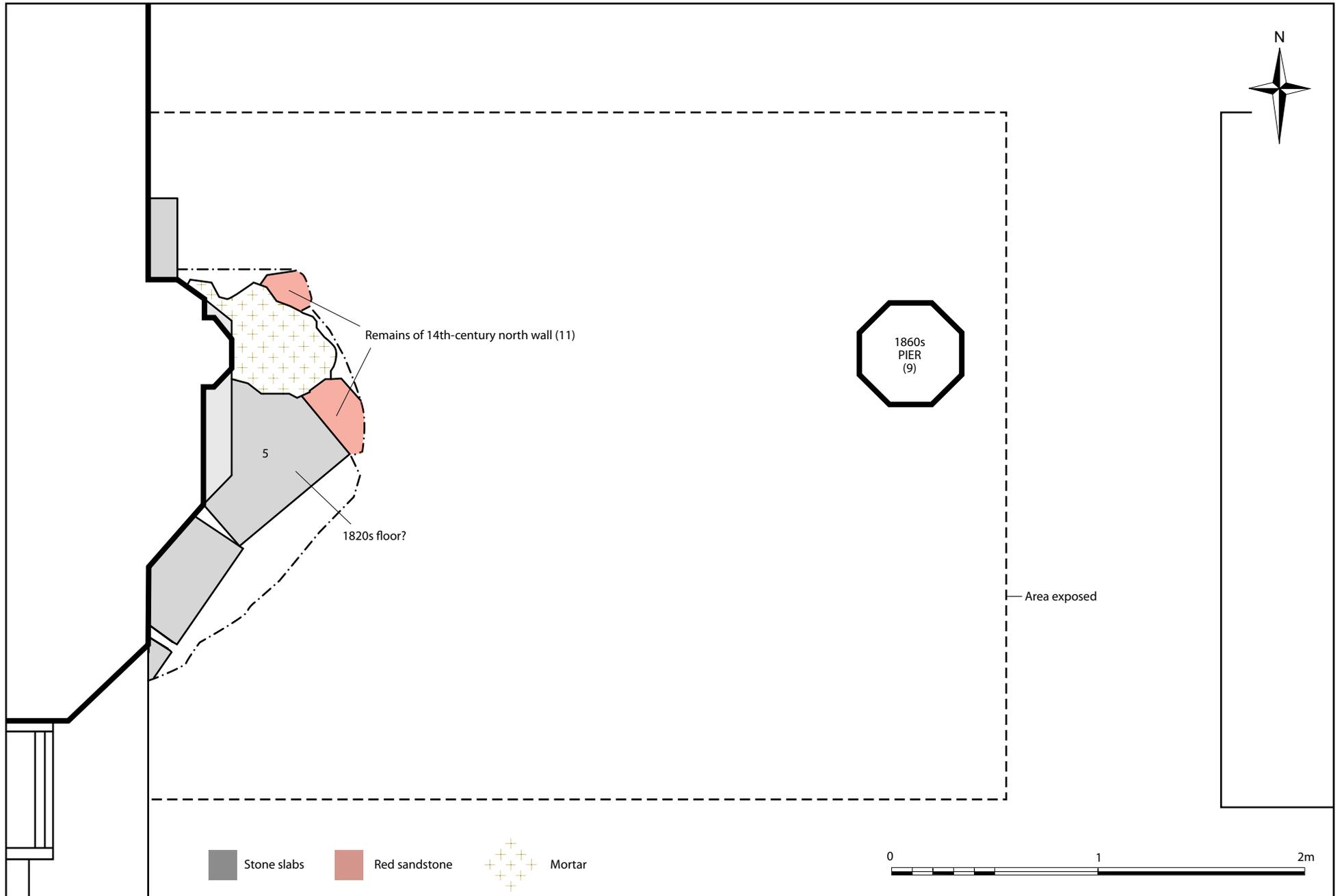


Fig 7: Detail of area exposed around pillar



Fig 8: View of sub-floor material and joist supports



Fig 9: Sub-floor cleaned of loose material



Fig 10: View of pier with stone slabs (5) below



Fig 11: Victorian quarry tile floor (8)



Fig 12: New joists being laid