

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

BONN SQUARE,

OXFORD

SP 5118 0615

On behalf of

Oxford City Council

NOVEMBER 2005

REPORT FOR Oxford City Council
Ramsey House
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Summary

An evaluation of this site was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services from the 25th – 28th October 2005. Two trenches, totalling 7 metres in length, and two small test pits at the base of the existing war memorial were excavated.

Trench 5 located the north wall of the later church of St Peter le Bailey and its associated cemetery. Trench 6 revealed the infilled interior of the church and a brick built crypt. Test Pits 7 & 8 were excavated to establish the depth and construction of the foundations of the war memorial.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located in the centre of Oxford on the north side of Queen Street and the west side of New Inn Hall Street. The present area is the site of a war memorial and open space. The area lies at NGR SP 5118 0615. The underlying geology is river gravel (2nd gravel terrace; BGS 1982) the site lies at approximately 65m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

Consideration is being given to the refurbishment of Bonn Square. It is proposed to repave and landscape on a gradient from existing at north side of the site down to Queen Street level at south, designed to avoid impact on burials, with stepped access at either side. New/replacement tree planting may use mature stock, requiring pits of *c.* 1m diameter and *c.* 1m depth. Creation of *c.* 100mm finishing over *c.* 300mm sub-base will potentially mean disturbance of superficial structures including the Trench 3 tomb base (see phase 1. TVAS BSO 03/31), and potentially remains of the 1728 church at the lower end of the wedge. Identification and possibly re-routing of services will be needed, for which a GPR survey is proposed and which will potentially confirm the plan of the classical church and even parts of its medieval predecessor.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The front part of the present raised area represents part of the 1728 church of St Peter le Bailey that was demolished for road widening in 1874. The floor of the 1728 church is likely to have been close to the level of the contemporary road, on the basis of old illustrations. Outside of the church to the north was the cemetery, the site of the present war memorial. Here the ground is typical of an ancient parish churchyard, arising from repeated burials with some addition of debris from demolition in 1874, as shown by the Phase 1 evaluation in 2003 (Hammond & Ford 2003). This included burying a headstone standing a little off-vertical. Most articulated human remains were shown to have been at a level near to, or below, modern street level.

The best evidence for the footprint of the 1728 church comes from the first Edition OS map that was published two years after its demolition. The east and south walls match closely to those recorded during utility trenching in March 1973. There is no comparable data for the medieval church. Loggan's map shows it to have comprised of a nave with central tower and North and South aisles, perhaps on a very similar footprint to the 1728 replacement. A 'floor' reported at a depth of 1.3m in 1973 could therefore relate to this medieval church. It must be noted the comparative street levels as illustrated by the cross-section of Castle Street 25m west of the church (Hassall 1971). It has been postulated that later floors may therefore survive better within the development site than within the street.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

In particular:

- To confirm the level at which significant articulated human remains survive in what will be the highest-impact area of the former graveyard.
- To identify the north wall of 18th century church and internal floor surfaces/burials.
- To investigate any possible evidence of the medieval church within the worst-case impact depth

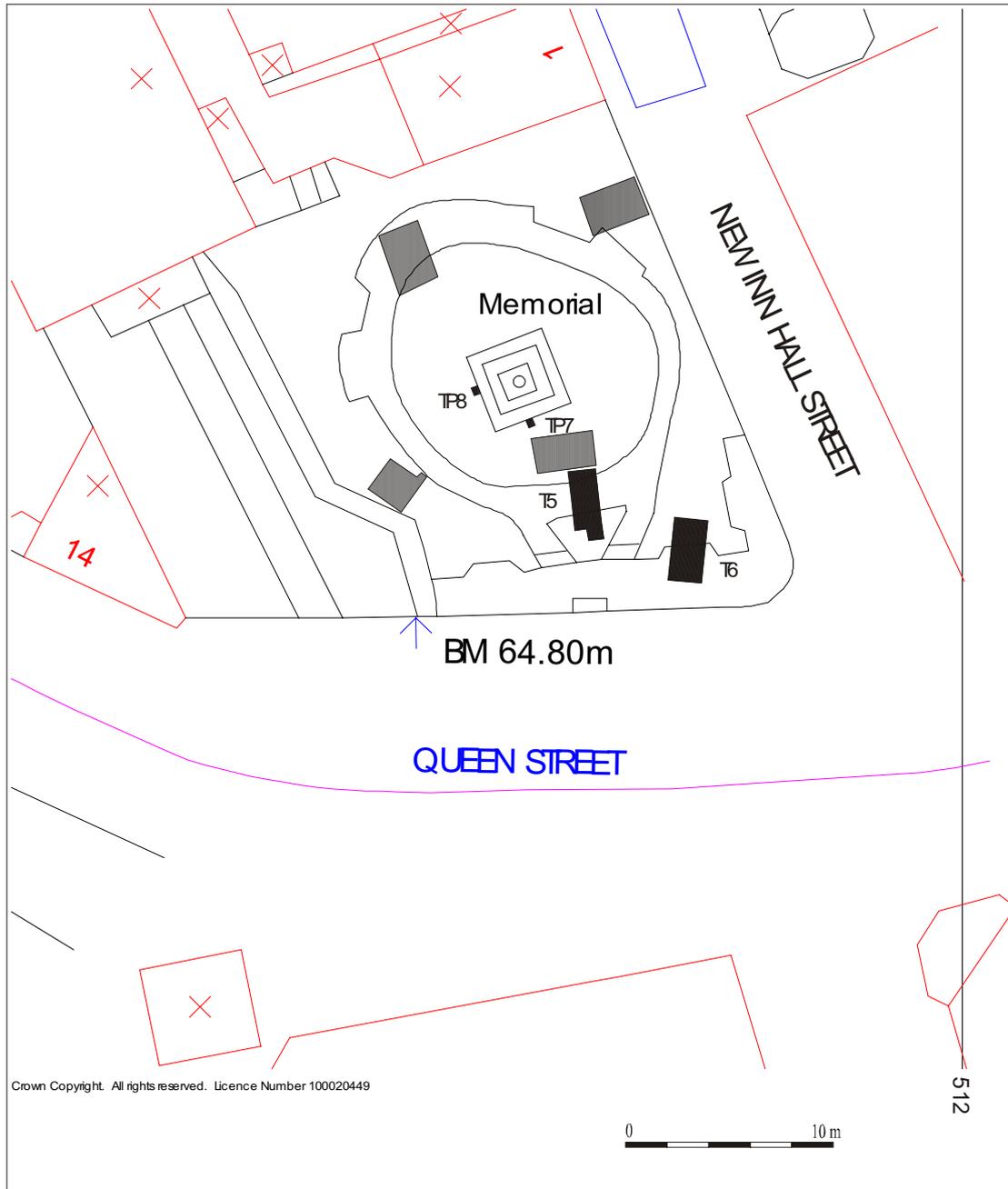


Figure 1. Site and trench location

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by Oxford City Council a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Oxford City Council. The Oxford Diocesan Chancellor imposed certain conditions on the work. The work was carried out by JMHS and was to involve the excavation of a total of three trenches across the site (Fig. 1). An additional test pit was excavated at the request of the consultant engineer and in agreement with Oxford City Council.

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

3.2 Methodology

The investigation involved the hand excavation of two trenches and two test pits as defined in the *Brief*, with Trench 6 in the position of option B.

The two trenches, 5 and 6, were 3m x 1.5m in size and dug to the depth of the anticipated engineering impact. Available 'free sections' from pits, grave cuts and robber trenches were to be used to examine the deposits. No articulated human remains were to be moved without direction from the Diocesan Chancellor. In the event no articulated remains were encountered.

In the case of no significant archaeological deposits being encountered at 1.2m depth, a contingency had been designed for extending deeper to characterise deposits that would provide more information on the historical interpretation of the site.

Test pits 7 and 8 were small hand dug trenches with a maximum 300mm width at the foot of the war memorial to confirm the existence and profile of any additional step and/or foundation offset/hardcore base.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

Due to the impact level of the development of the site and the required depth of excavation, the underlying gravel terrace geology was not encountered in any of the trenches.

As a request from the City Council all trenches were excavated with the utmost care towards roots of existing trees on the site.

Trench 5 (*Figure 2*)

The lowest deposit encountered at 64.40m OD was a light brown gravelly silt sand, with small quantities of limestone fragments (18). Overlaying this was a light grey brown silt sand deposit, which was cut by three graves aligned E-W in the trench. Two of the graves [20] and [22] contained disarticulated human remains (19 & 21) from disturbance of burials that were re-interred during backfilling of the graves. A larger possible double grave [24] appeared to be cutting grave [22] on its north side. All three graves fills contained disturbed and redeposited coffin furniture in the form of iron coffin handles, brass and copper studs.

At the southern end of the trench some 0.25m below existing ground level was the remains of a 1m wide wall [25], which was aligned east to west. On the exterior face of the wall was a string course of ashlar blocks, above which the wall was constructed of limestone blocks, and below the ashlars it was made from roughly hewn limestone. The interior face had an offset course of stonework.

Overlaying all the graves was a distinct mid grey brown silt sand deposit (16). This was 0.10m thick where it abutted wall [25], raising sharply and thickening to 0.58m at the northern end of the trench.

A compacted lime mortar surface 1.80m wide and 0.08m thick (14) was seen between just north of wall [25] and where deposit (16) rises; this has been interpreted as a pathway between the church and graveyard. This pathway was bedded on a 50mm thick compact layer of orange clay and gravel (15). The relationship between the path and wall had been destroyed by extensive root disturbance. Laying directly on the pathway surface were broken fragments of several large tombstones, which may have been deposited during the demolition process in 1874 in an attempt to level up the ground. These were covered by a 400mm thick deposit of friable grey and light grey-brown sandy gravel (13).

The uppermost deposit was a dark brown sandy loam (12) that was 0.35m thick; this is the present topsoil on the site.

Trench 6 (*Figure 3*)

The earliest deposit seen and recorded was a very thick friable mix of crushed mortar and fragments of limestone incorporating some ceramic building materials and occasional fragments of moulded plasterwork (7). This deposit was recorded as 0.90m thick but due to the imposed depth restrictions on the excavation this deposit was not fully excavated. It continued down below 63.66m O.D. Cutting this deposit at the north end of the trench was a large grave cut [9] aligned E-W into which had been constructed a brick built crypt with a limestone slab capping (8). The grave was then

filled with (6), a mid brown silt sand. This was in turn overlain by (4) which was very similar to deposit (7) and may represent re-deposition.

The only other feature present was a set of steps and an associated clinker/ash path [02] on a make-up of yellow sand (03), and a levelling layer of grey brown sandy silt (05). The steps are almost identical to the existing *in situ* steps of the present Bonn Square. These were covered by topsoil (1).

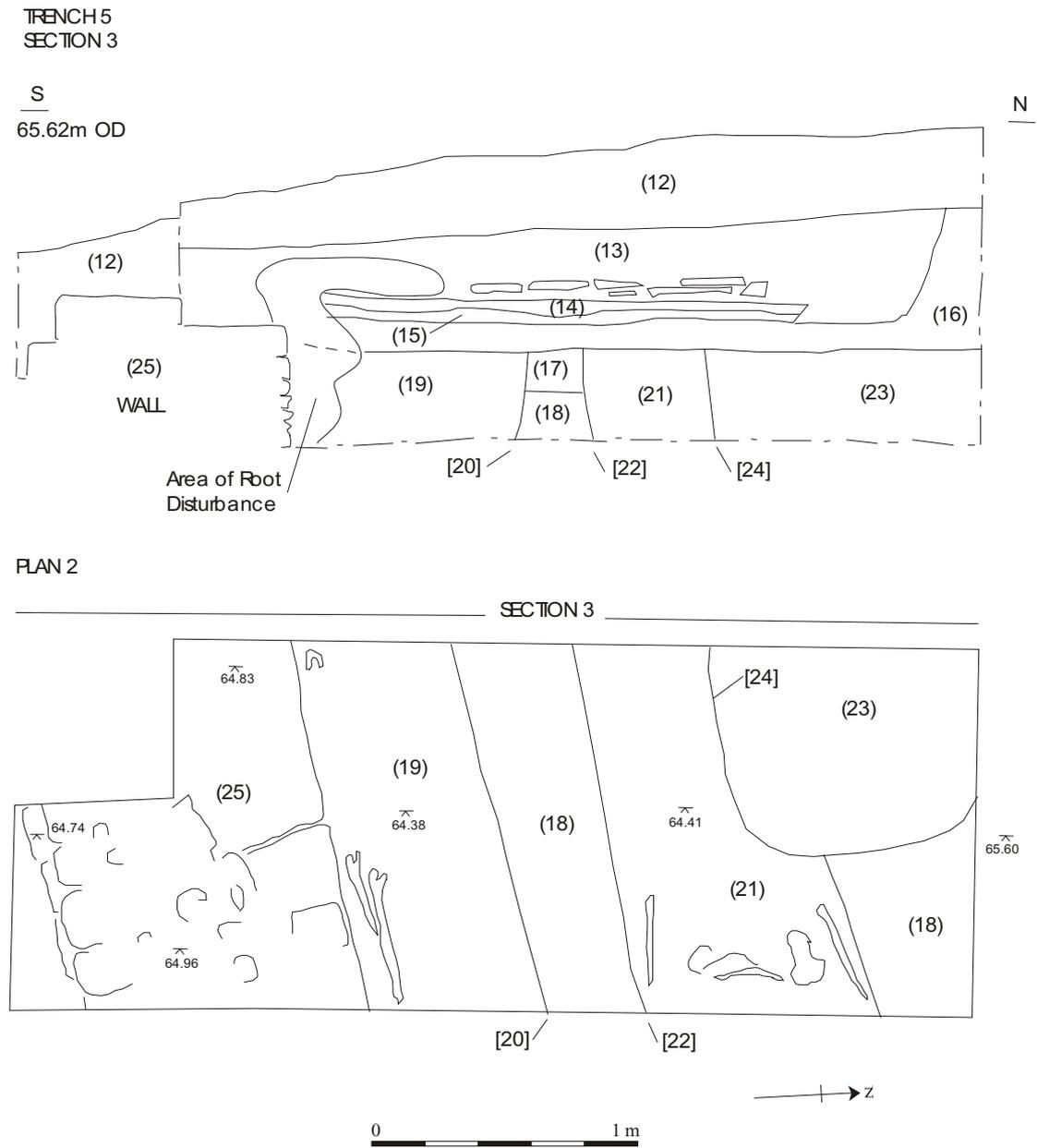


Figure 2: Trench 5 Plan and Section

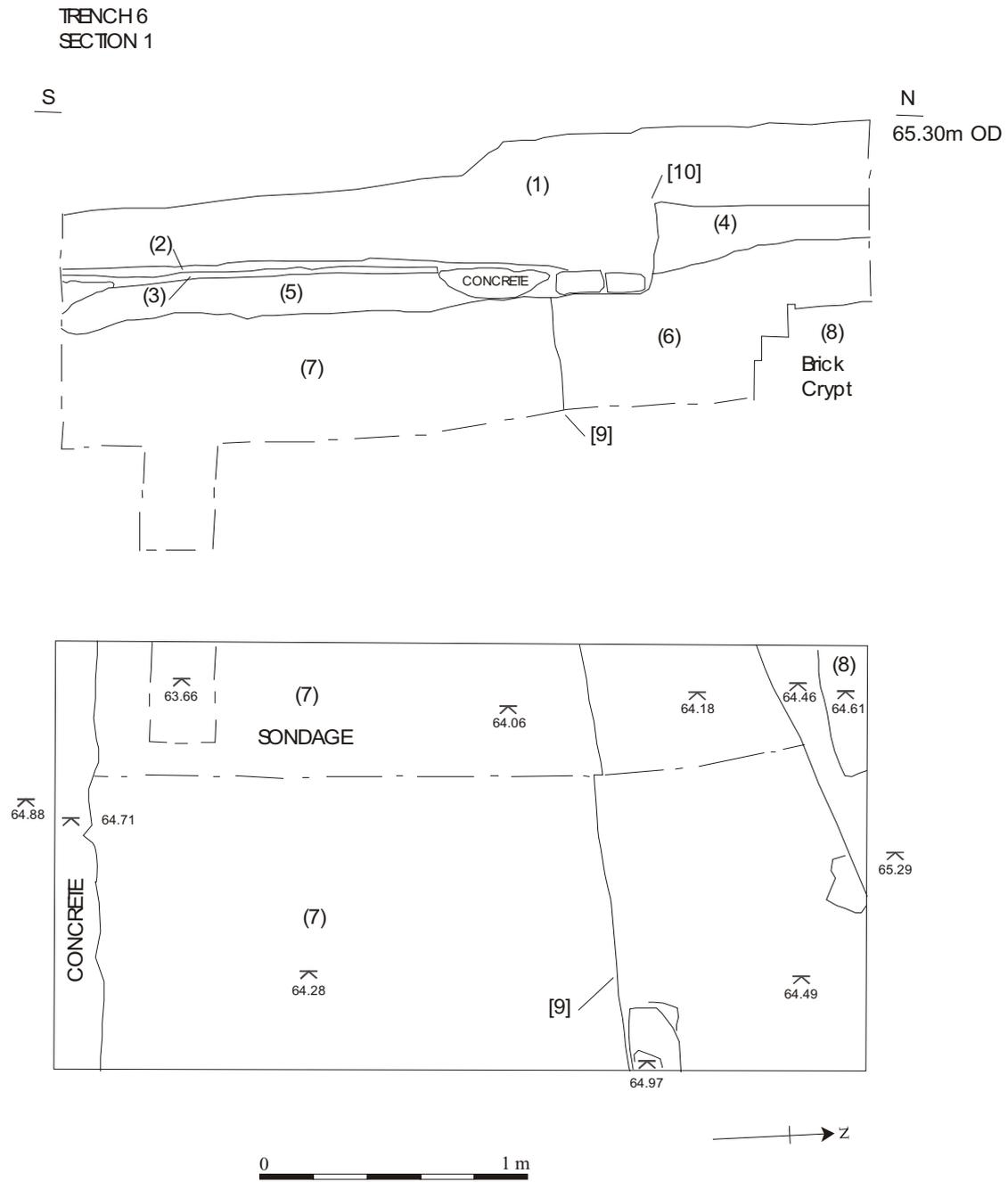


Figure 3. Trench 6 Plan and section

Test Pits 7 & 8 (*Figure 4*)

These two test pits were dug to establish the depth and construction of the footing to the war memorial

The bottom step of the existing monument was seen to sit directly on a slight off-set foundation of brick and concrete to a depth of 0.6m below existing ground level.

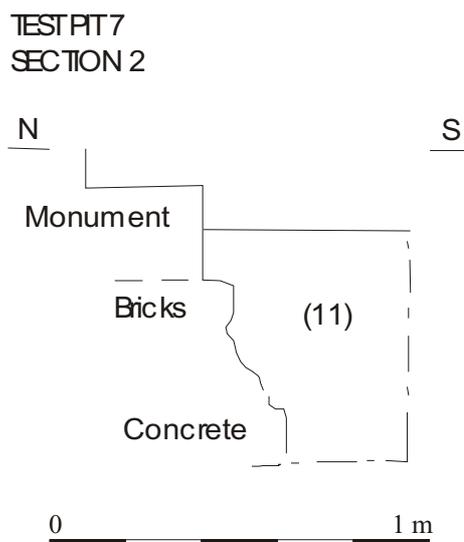


Figure 4. Test Pit Section.

5 FINDS

Due to the initial conditions imposed by the Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee finds were not collected and bagged by context. However following a meeting on site finds from context (19) were collected and have been analysed. Although these finds are from a grave fill and may represent residual material, they help date and phase the graveyard.

5.1 Pottery. (*by Paul Blinkhorn*)

The pottery from context (19) was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXBEWSL Staffordshire Slip Trail Earthenware 1640-1800 1 sherd 12g
OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 2 sherds, 45g.

5.2 Clay Tobacco Pipes *(by John Moore)*

Parts of two pipes were found within context (19). Both were complete bowls, one with part of the stem attached.

The bowls have been compared to the type series devised by Oswald (1975) and 'class' refers to their type series number. All dates given are approximate according to Oswald.

One is a class G 5 dated to c. 1640-60 while the other is class G 17 of c. 1640-70.

6 DISCUSSION

No evidence for the exact location of the earlier medieval church was encountered, although the thick deposit (7) seen in Trench 6 may represent the destruction rubble from this phase of church building. The three graves in Trench 5 possibly belong to the earlier cemetery associated with the medieval church prior to its collapse in 1726. These were sealed underneath a distinct deposit (16), although no dating evidence was collected from this deposit to firmly establish a date for this. The material recovered from the fill (19) of grave [20] indicates that it was dug after c. 1670, which would be consistent with later graves of this earlier cemetery being identifiable from a high level (although see below).

The east-west wall seen in Trench 5 must be the north side of the 1728 church of St Peter Le Bailey. The mortar pathway probably separates the church from the cemetery to the north, although no cemetery boundary wall (seen on the first edition OS) was encountered, this may have been robbed totally unlike the church, which was robbed only to ground level. It is probable that the path was not original to the layout of this later church. The presence of burial [20] close to the wall is either a coincidence or the burial relates to the later churchyard, having been dug close to the church. The root disturbance has destroyed the relationship between the burial and the wall construction. The underside of layer (16) is at the expected height of the ground level associated with the later church given its level in relation to the string course. Layer (16) is probably eroded material from a battered bank south of the postulated graveyard wall as seemingly indicated on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. The unnumbered mortar layer in Trench 3 (Hammond & Ford, 2003, Figs. 6 & 7) may be a mortar bedding layer for a low wall. The Trench 3 mortar layer is c. 0.3m below the top of layer (16) within Trench 5 allowing for a shallow foundation. The cut for the tomb within Trench 3 would respect this wall. If layer (16) is as described above then grave [19] could be associated with the later church but graves [22] and [24] would be associated with the earlier cemetery as they would be under such a bank. The path is a later addition apparently at a higher level than the intended original ground level.

The brick crypt (8), seen in Trench 6 was cut through demolition rubble (7) associated with the earlier church and must have been built within the nave of the later church, up against the north wall. Assuming this crypt was below the level of the floor it is evident that no floor levels survive from the later phase of church. No floors for the earlier church were discovered although these may lie below the lowest level of excavation. The 1973 'floor' could lie 300-400mm below the bottom of the lowest

excavation level within Trench 6 if the 1973 observation was from street/pavement level.

The deposition of broken tombstones upon the pathway (14) must represent the subsequent demolition and levelling of the ground associated with the widening of Queen Street in 1874.

Due to the amount of root disturbance in both trenches not all relationships were clear however possible scenarios have been given.

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APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Findings	Date
Trench 5			1.2	1.5	3.5		
12	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam	0.35	Tr.	Tr.		Modern
13	Deposit	Grey-brown sandy gravel	0.4	Tr.	Tr.		Modern
14	Deposit	Compact lime mortar	0.08	1.8	-		
15	Deposit	Orange gravels	0.08	1.8	-	-	
16	Deposit	Grey-brown silty sand	0.5				
17	Deposit	Grey-brown silty sand	0.15			-	
18	Deposit	Brown silty-sand with limestone	0.18		-	-	
19	Fill	Brown silty-sand	0.3 +	0.9		Bone, pot	1640 - 1800
20	Cut	Grave cut	0.3 +	0.9			
21	Fill	Grey-brown silty sand	0.3 +	0.85		Bone	
22	Cut	Grave cut	0.3 +	0.85			
23	Fill	Grey-brown silty sand	0.3 +	1.0 +			
24	Cut	Grave cut	0.3 +	1.0 +			
25	Feature	Wall	0.6 +	1.1	Tr.	-	
Trench 6			1.2	1.5	3.5		
1	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam	0.26			-	Modern
2	Deposit	Compact dark grey ash and cinders	0.04	0.2	1.4	-	Modern
3	Deposit	Yellow sand	0.04	0.2	1.4	-	Modern
4	Fill	limestone and mortar fragments	0.28			-	
5	Deposit	Grey-brown sandy silt	0.23			-	
6	Fill	Mid brown sandy silt	0.6			-	
7	Deposit	limestone and mortar fragments	0.9			-	
8	Feature	Brick Crypt	-			-	
9	Cut	Grave cut	-			-	
10	Cut	Irregular cut	-	-	-	-	Modern

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Test Pits 7 & 8			0.6	0.3	0.5		
11	Deposit	Mid brown sand silt	0.6	Tr.	Tr.	-	Modern