



St Mary's Church, Chickkerell

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Excavation of Structural Engineer's Test Pits



Report No. 53486/3/1

May 2018

St Mary's Church, Chickereil, Dorset

Archaeological observations and recording during excavation of structural engineer's test pits, March 2018

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Client: St Mary's Chickereil PCC

Agent:

Report Author: Mike Trevarthen BA (Hons) ACIfA

Illustrations: Mike Trevarthen BA (Hons) ACIfA

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Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
OASIS Reference	terraina1-317376		
Project Title	Engineer's Test Pits, Parish Church of St Mary, Chickerell, Dorset		
Short Description of Project	<p>Terrain Archaeology carried out archaeological observations and recording during the excavation of three test pits against the South Porch, Nave and North Aisle of the Parish Church of St Mary, Chickerell, West Dorset.</p> <p>All three pits exposed elements of the medieval and later foundations of the church. Pit 3 against the west end of the early nineteenth century North Aisle also revealed the upper legs of an older articulated uncoffined human skeleton, buried supine with head to the west. This discovery confirms previous site observations that the north aisle was built out over parts of the churchyard formerly used for burial.</p>		
Project Dates	Start: 06-03-2018	End: 06-03-2018	
Previous/Future Work	Yes/Yes		
Project Code	53485		
Monument Type and Period	Church (Medieval); Church (Post-Medieval); Inhumation Burial (Medieval)		
Significant Finds	None		
Project Location			
County/District/Parish	Dorset/ West Dorset/Chickerell		
Site Address	St Mary's Church, North Square, Chickerell, Dorset, DT3 4DX		
Site Coordinates	SY 6438 8069		
Site Area	c. 1 m ²		
Height OD	c. 31.7 m		
Project Creators			
Organisation	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Brief Originator	None		
Project Design Originator	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Supervisor	Mike Trevarthen		
Project Manager	Peter Bellamy		
Sponsor or Funding Body	St Mary's, Chickerell PCC		
Project Archive			
Archive Type	Physical	Digital	Paper
Location/Accession No	None	None	None
Contents	None	None	None

St Mary's Church, Chickerell, Dorset

Archaeological observations and recording during excavation of structural engineer's test pits, March 2018

1. Introduction

1.1 Project introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) to undertake a programme of archaeological observations and recording during the manual excavation of structural engineer's test pits at three external locations adjacent to the south- and west sides of St Mary's church, Chickerell, Dorset. The works were undertaken to assess the potential need for further structural underpinning of the church walls to stabilise the building.

An Interim Faculty dated 15 January 2018 was issued for the excavation of trial holes to enable the Structural Engineer to appraise the ground conditions beneath the building, in order to understand the cause(s) of structural movement and cracking, and also to be able to design and specify appropriate mitigation to stabilise the structure. It was subject to a number of conditions. Condition 2 states: *The works shall be executed under the direction of the inspecting architect and subject to an archaeological watching brief in terms to be agreed between the inspecting architect and the archaeologist. In the event that agreement cannot be reached the matter shall be referred back to the Chancellor for directions.*

The fieldwork was carried out on the 6th March 2018 by Mike Trevarthen BA (Hons.), ACIfA.

1.2 Project Brief and Specification

No written brief was produced by or on behalf of the Client.

1.3 Site Location

The Site lies north of North Square within the historic core of Chickerell village (Figure 1). The area of works was centred on OS NGR SY 64383 80690. Ground levels within the site locally slope moderately from south- to north, dropping from c. 34 m above OD immediately north of the church to c. 30 m above OD at the south churchyard gate. The church buildings set on an artificially levelled cut terrace.

1.4 Geology

Bedrock geology is mapped as Jurassic limestone of the Cornbrash Formation (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>). No Superficial Deposits are mapped.

1.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

A small quantity of prehistoric and Roman finds have been recovered from beneath the church and in the churchyard, including Mesolithic worked flint (including evidence for microlith production), residual later prehistoric worked flint and small amounts of residual Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman pottery (Terrain Archaeology 2011). These finds fit within a wider prehistoric and Roman landscape. Mesolithic flint has been recovered from the area of The Fleet (Palmer 1963; 1966) and a possible late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age timber monument or henge, and a later Bronze Age settlement and field system, are known locally (Woodward 2000; 2002). Two Late Bronze Age gold neck rings were also found nearby (*ibid.*). Roman occupation debris and burials have been noted in the vicinity of the former Putton Lane brickworks and a Roman cemetery and other Roman finds have been identified near Buckland Ripers (RCHME 1970, 595; <http://finds.org.uk>).

The historic parish of Chickereil (which was enlarged to its current extent in the 20th century) contained three settlements at Chickereil, Putton and East Chickereil. Only Chickereil (*Chicherelle*) is recorded in the 1086 Domesday Survey, but the entry may incorporate all three settlements. Putton was first mentioned in 1237 and medieval earthwork settlement remains have been recorded to the east of Putton Lane (RCHME 1970, 41). No medieval or earlier remains, other than the church itself are recorded in Chickereil village. The curvilinear shape formed by North Square and Townsend has led to the suggestion that this is part of a Saxon settlement (Ricketts 1977). Also, it has been suggested that the site of the present 6 North Square (built early 17th century) was formerly the location of a 13th century Priest's House (Newnham 1997, 6). Confirmatory evidence for this appears to be lacking.

St Mary's Church has been dated to the late 13th century with the nave and chancel generally considered as contemporary (RCHME 1970, 38-9; Pitfield 1981, 183). The chancel east window and the south doorways of the nave and chancel have been dated to the 13th century and the chancel arch is considered late 13th century in date (RCHME 1970, 38). There are some remains that are earlier, namely the font and the treble bell (the second oldest bell in the county), which are dated to the 12th century (RCHME 1970, 38; Dalton 2000, 191-2). These point to the existence of an earlier church. The earliest reference to the church is in the 1291 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* where the *ecclesia de Chykerel* is valued at £5-0-0.

The bell-cote and supporting three-stage buttress at the west end of the church are thought to be 14th century additions, as are two of the windows in the south nave wall: That at the east end (a small window set high in the east end of the wall) is assumed to have lit a rood loft. The 15th century saw insertion of the east nave window and the two south windows of the chancel (Pitfield 1981, 183). The south porch was built or rebuilt in 1722. Newnham says that the present porch replaced a 15th century one, but no evidence for this is presented (Newnham 1997, 13). Part of a 15th century Purbeck Marble grave slab incised with the image of a cleric in academic dress was discovered in the 19th century and had been re-used as a floor slab, (RCHME 1970, 38).

By the 18th and early 19th century, many parish churches in Dorset (as elsewhere) were suffering from (sometimes near-ruinous) neglect, physical decline and structural degradation as church rates rarely raised enough money to pay for anything more than minor repairs (Davies 1993, 26). Chickereil was no different. In the early 19th century there appeared to be a need for greater accommodation within the church. This was initially addressed by the relatively inexpensive addition of a new gallery along the north wall of the nave in 1805 (Atkins n.d., 11). In 1834 sufficient funds were raised by public subscription to enable a new north aisle to be added to the church with three cast iron pillars to support the roof replacing the north wall of the nave. The gallery was remodelled to run across the whole length of the west end of the church. The upper part of the walls of the chancel may have been lowered at some time in the early 19th century as a drawing of the church in 1804 by the Rev. John Skinner shows the eaves of the chancel at about the level of the present eaves of the nave (RCHME 1970, 38). This work had been carried out by 1835, judging from drawings of the new work dated to that year (www.churchplanonline.org). It is entirely possible that this work to the chancel was carried out at the same time as the construction of the north aisle.

Despite this, by the mid-19th century there are reports of the poor state of repair of the church, and in a Vestry meeting of June 1865 proposed that inquiries should be made as to whether a piece of land to the north of the churchyard could be obtained as an addition to the present churchyard (which was overcrowded) and as a site for a new church (Atkins n.d., 10). In 1871 it is recorded that "the roof of the nave, now covered with lead, admits wet, and is unsafe for the congregation", and in 1875 the Diocesan Surveyor reported that construction of a new church was essential, either on the present site or a new site chosen by the Rector and Churchwardens (Atkins n. d., 10; Newnham 1997, 15). The Rector, the Rev. J. Alleyne Beckles, was in favour of building a new church on a new site rather than spending money on the existing fabric (Atkins n. d., 10-11). It is clear that the church was not rebuilt on a different site, but it is difficult to square this historical account with the record of restorations in the second half of the 19th century. In 1865 the chancel was restored (RCHME 1970, 38), but no details of the work carried out are available. It is also recorded that there was further restoration in 1875, but no details of this work are known and it is unclear whether the proposed works were carried out (www.churchplanonline.org). There was a major restoration in 1896 which included the removal of the box pews, a new floor to the nave and north aisle and perhaps a new roof.

The chancel arch was underpinned and repaired in brickwork and many other repairs done to the fabric (DHC PE/CHI CW4/2).

A vestry, designed by the Dorchester architect Sydney Jackson, was built on the north side of the chancel in 1936-37 (Pitfield 1981, 183). This vestry was dedicated to the memory of the Revd Sealy Poole (1892-1934). It was demolished in 2010, and was replaced by a new larger vestry and kitchen.

1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

Between 2010 and 2011 Terrain Archaeology carried out a programme of archaeological observation and recording at St Mary's Church. Works carried out at this time included excavation of a new service trench from the North Square gate across part of the graveyard, area clearance for construction of a new Vestry, and significant reduction of internal ground levels throughout the Nave and the much of the Chancel. The works revealed evidence for prehistoric activity including a scatter of Mesolithic flintwork, later prehistoric flintwork, trace amounts of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman pottery, and an almost north-south aligned ditch beneath the chancel/chancel arch. The latter feature was undated, but stratigraphically pre-dated construction of the church.

From the medieval and post-medieval periods, large numbers of extramural- and intramural burials were identified and key aspects of the structural and historical development of the church were recorded. These included the footing for the demolished former north Nave wall, and partially robbed footings on the south and west sides of the Nave indicating that the extant walls in these locations were rebuilt probably in the 13th or 14th century. Of particular significance to the present investigation, it also demonstrated that the early nineteenth century North Aisle was terraced into the hillslope and built out over part of the churchyard formerly used for burial (Terrain Archaeology 2011).

1.7 Aims and Objectives

Aims

- The principal aim of the Archaeological programme of works was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site in fulfilment of the Archaeological Planning Condition.
- The programme of works aimed to place the archaeological results within the local, regional and national context, as appropriate, and advance understanding of the archaeology of the site and its surroundings.

Objectives

- To investigate and record all the in situ archaeological deposits and features revealed during the programme of works to an appropriate professional standard.
- To record recovered artefacts and other materials to an appropriate standard.
- To present the results in a report to the appropriate standard.

1.8 Groundworks

Three small test pits were excavated by hand against the South Porch, the west end of the Nave and against the west end of the North Aisle (Figure 2).

1.9 Methods

All archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014a).

Test pits were manually excavated by the groundwork contractor under the direction of the attending structural engineer and further modified, where necessary, by the attending archaeologist. A photographic record of the works was maintained in digital format. Given the rapidity and small-scale impact of the works no formal written archive was generated, but relevant observation notes have been incorporated into the results section of this report.

1.10 Archive and Dissemination

1.10.1 Paper Archive

No paper archive will be retained beyond the end of the project.

1.10.2 Artefacts

No artefacts or other materials were recovered from the site.

1.10.3 Report

A copy of this report will be lodged with Dorset County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). The HER is a publicly funded and accessible resource, and deposition of the report will place it, and the project results, in the public domain.

A digital summary of the archive will be placed with the OASIS project (www.oasis.ac.uk) under the reference code *terraina1-317376*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

2. Results

2.1 Test Pit 1

Test Pit 1 was dug adjacent to the south eastern corner of the South Porch (Figure 2, Plate 1). It measured 0.6 m by 0.5 m at ground level, and was 0.5 m deep. A limestone rubble footing was identified beneath the porch wall, of unknown depth and presumably originally contained within a simple linear cut into pre-existing graveyard soils. No detailed recording of the footing was possible.

2.2 Test Pit 2

Test Pit 2 was sited at the south end of the west end of the Nave (Figure 2, Plate 2). It measured 0.5 m by 0.4 m at ground level and was about 0.9m deep. Several courses of undressed limestone footing were seen flush with the offset near the base of the Nave wall. This footing appeared to have a base at c. 0.8 m below modern ground level, although inward tapering of the pit makes this observation tentative. Soils outside the footing comprised homogenous graveyard soil below a recent thin capping of fine gravel.

2.3 Test Pit 3

Test Pit 3 was sited at the north end of the western end of the North Aisle, (Figures 2 and 3, Plate 3) on the terrace created for the construction of the North Aisle. It measured 0.6 m by 0.5 m and was dug to a maximum depth of about 0.35 m below (reduced) ground level.

At about 0.25 m below ground level a pair of *in situ* human femurs was identified indicating a supine, uncoffined adult burial, interred with head to the west. The burial is not intrinsically dated, but its relatively shallow burial depth and the presence of small hand bones between the upper ends of the femurs suggests typical medieval or early post-medieval placement with hands crossed over the pelvis. The skeleton lay in mid yellow-brown silty clay. No grave cut could be discerned within the small area exposed. To the east, the lower legs were cut away above the knees by construction of the North Aisle.

The pit additionally exposed an external basal offset to the North Aisle wall of about 0.15 m. This appears to comprise only a single course of undressed (or very crudely dressed) sub-square limestone blocks and was not present internally (Terrain Archaeology 2011).

3. Finds

3.1 Finds Assemblage

Other than the human bone in Test Pit 3, no significant pre-modern artefacts were found. The bone was retained in situ and reburied below a protective layer of soil prior to backfilling of the pit.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

All three test pits provided new information on the below-ground fabric of the church. A crude rubble footing was identified beneath the eighteenth century South Porch (Test Pit 1) and Test Pit 2 exposed the probable base of the footings for the medieval west wall of the Nave. Test Pit 3 revealed a shallow external offset to the foundation of the 1834 North Aisle.

The remains of an uncoffined burial truncated by the construction of the North Aisle in 1834 were discovered in Test Pit 3. This burial is undated but is likely to be of medieval or post-medieval date and was originally buried in the churchyard. The shallow depth of the burial is a result of the cutting of the terrace for the construction of the North Aisle. This discovery corresponds with similar observations made inside the church in 2010-2011 (Terrain Archaeology 2011). The evidence from Test Pit 3, taken together with the results of the earlier investigations in the church, suggests that any works to underpin the North Aisle is likely to disturb earlier burials. These may be simple shrouded burials or more complex coffined burials, the latter probably of later post-medieval date.

The potential for the eighteenth century South Porch to overlie older human burials south of the medieval church remains unknown. The porch may replace an earlier church door (Newnham 1997, 13) but the potential impact of underpinning on any burials that may be present in this area cannot currently be assessed. Similarly, the potential for burials to be impacted by works to the foundation of the medieval Nave is unknown.

4.2 Conclusions

The results of the programme of archaeological observations and recording indicate that any invasive digging beneath, or immediately adjacent to walls at St Mary's Church will carry a high potential to adversely impact heritage assets of moderate (local)- to high (national) significance.

5. References

- | | | |
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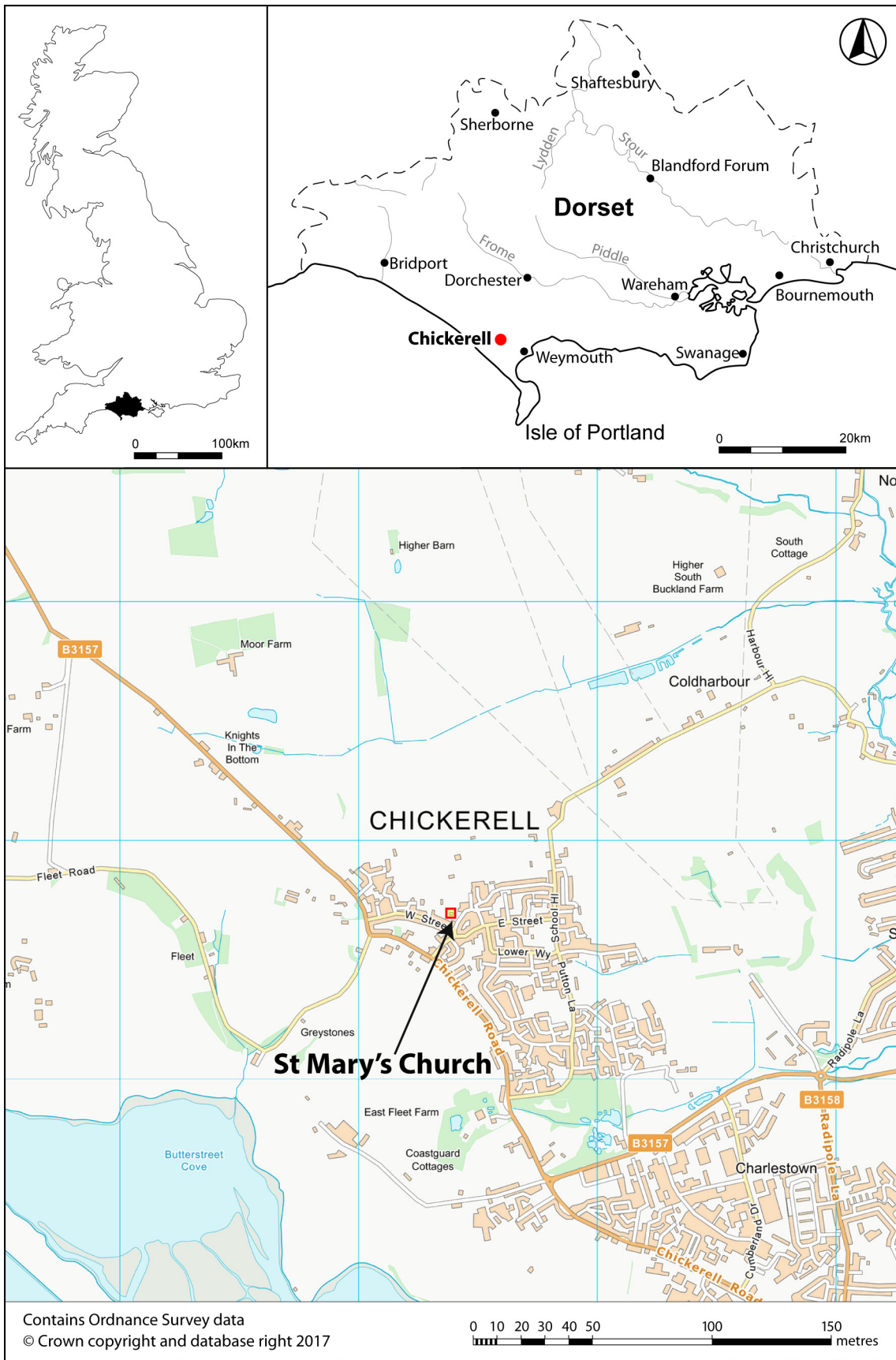


Figure 1: Site Location.

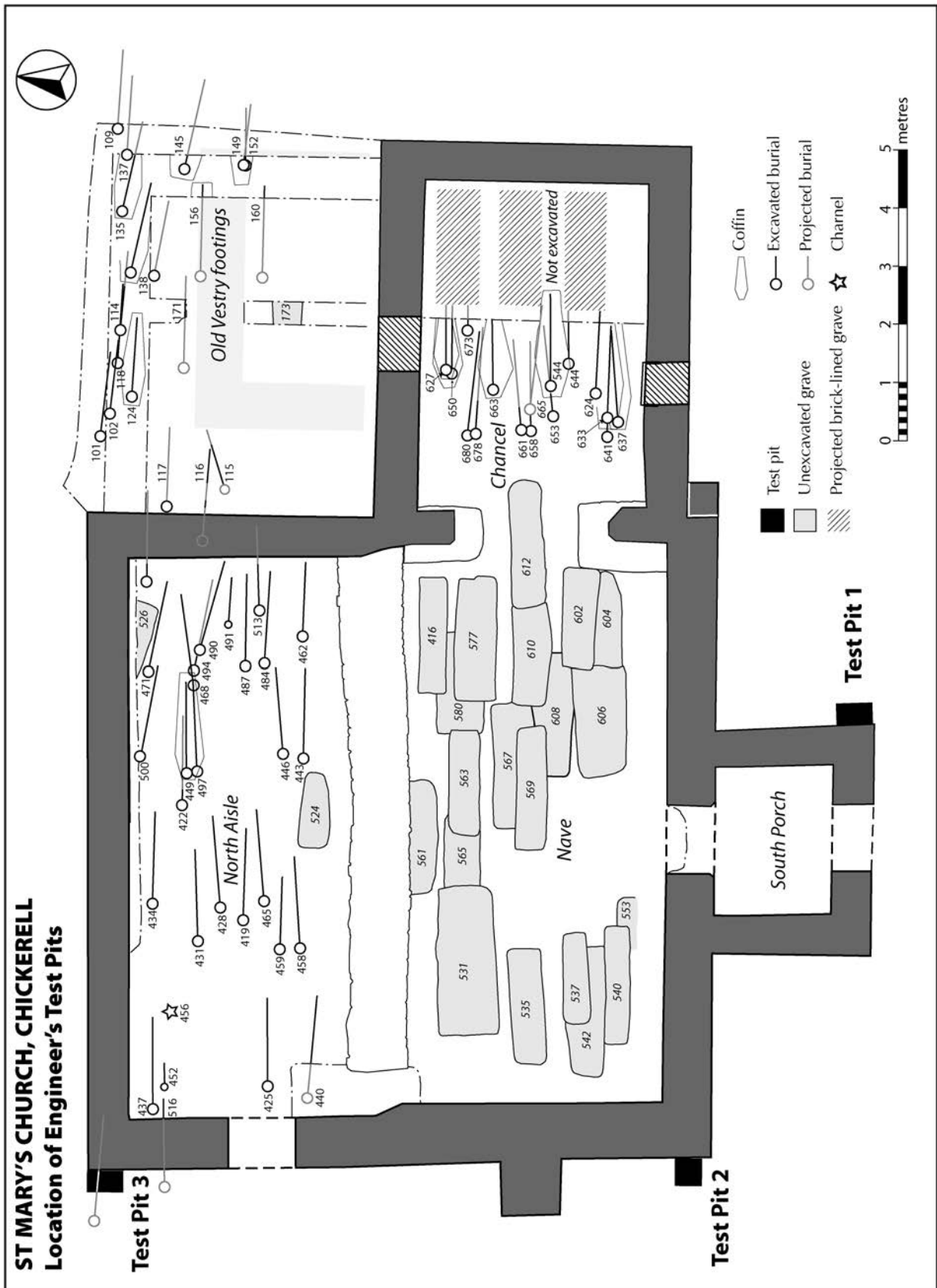


Figure 2: Plan of Test Pit locations and previous archaeological results (from Terrain Archaeology 2011).

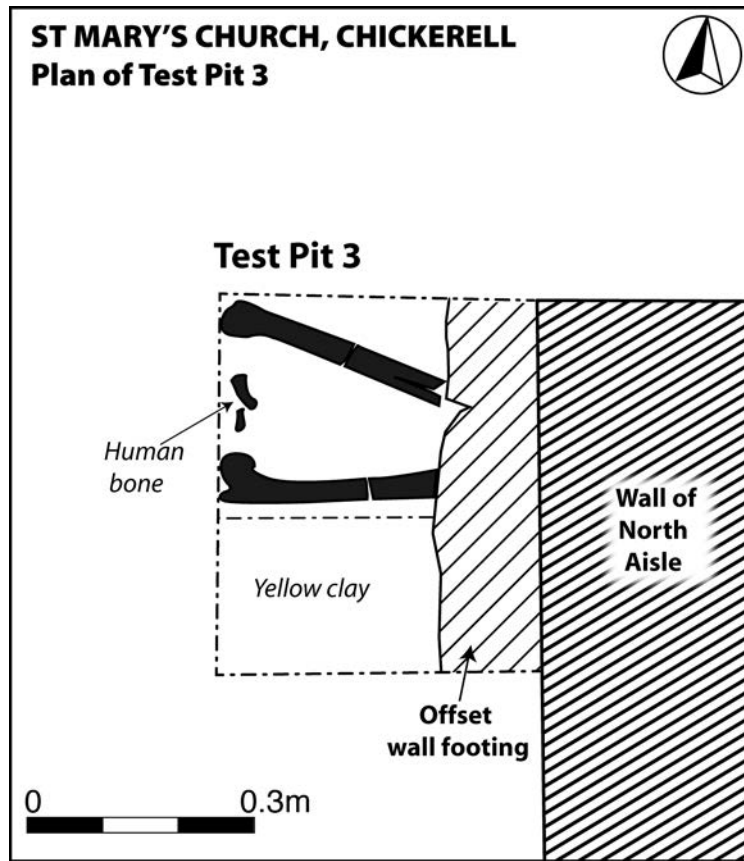


Figure 3: Detailed plan of Test Pit 3.



Plate 1: Test Pit 1, showing the rubble footing of the South Porch. View from East. 0.3m scale.



Plate 2: Test Pit 2, showing foundation of the west Nave wall. View from west. 0.3m scale.



Plate 3: Test Pit 3, showing the upper legs of an articulated human burial cut by the foundation for the North Aisle. Vertical, north to top of frame. 0.3m scale.