



LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

**St Michael's Church Burwell, Lincs
Archaeological Watching Brief**

NGR: TF 3558 7970

Site Code: BSMC 01

LCNCC Museum Accn. No.: 2001.241

Archaeological Watching Brief

Report

for

Marshall Sisson Architect

on behalf of the

Churches Conservation Trust

by N. Field

LAS Report No. 570

January 2002

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Summary

Two narrow drainage trenches were excavated on either side of the south porch leading to a single soakaway in the path leading to the church. They revealed the foundations of the south wall of the demolished south aisle. A provisional sequence of construction and alterations to the church is proposed.

Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services (LAS) was commissioned by the Churches Conservation Trust in July 2001 to undertake an archaeological watching brief during trenching to insert new drainage channels on either side of the south porch at St Michael's Church, Burwell.

The watching brief was conducted in accordance with general requirements set out in the *Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook* published by the Archaeology Section, Lincolnshire County Council (1998). The watching brief, by Naomi Field, took place on July 24th 2001.

Site Location

Burwell is a small village in the Lincolnshire wolds on the A16 between Louth and Spilsby, 10km south of Louth. St Michael's Church is sited on a hill above the modern village with a green lane providing access from the south (Fig. 1, Pls. 1 and 2).

Objectives

Two narrow drainage trenches were excavated on either side of the south porch leading to a single soakaway in the path leading to the church. The purpose of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits disturbed during groundworks.

Description

The village of Burwell is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 when it was the centre of an estate (manor) held by Ansgot (a minor landholder in the county). However, Burwell was a prosperous community and the value of the manor in 1066 was £16, £4 greater than Louth, the nearest town, although by 1086 Louth had outstripped Burwell in value. Both a mill and a church are recorded in the entry. There was a market at Burwell by 1300, an indication of its continued local importance.

The present church consists of a north aisle, nave, chancel and tower. The Norman chancel arch sits on Anglo-Saxon piers, the only surviving visible fabric from this period. The main entrance to

the church is through a Norman south door which appears to have been inserted into a filled-in Early English arcade (twelfth-thirteenth century build) in the nave south wall. The two filled-in arcades east of the porch contain straight-headed windows of late fifteenth/early sixteenth century date.

The present porch is built in brick with a tumbled gable, suggesting an eighteenth/early nineteenth century date (Pl. 3). The bricks are hand-made and fairly narrow (228 x 110 x 60-64mm) confirming a manufacture date before the mid-nineteenth century. It has a Welsh slate roof which must be nineteenth century (Welsh slate was not imported into Lincolnshire before this date) but need not be an original covering. The porch may be contemporary with the rebuild of the upper stage of the tower, and the raising of the nave, which are also in brick. The nave roof was repaired in 1911.

The Watching Brief

West Trench

The trench was dug to a depth of 1.20m below existing ground level. At the north end of the trench the nave wall plinth was exposed at a depth of 0.70m. It was a simple chamfered plinth in sandstone 0.06m high and 0.14m wide sitting on coursed stone 0.36m high to the base of the foundations. It runs beneath the blocked arcade and presumably belongs to the original nave wall (Pls 4 and 5).

The trench excavation exposed the lower levels of the porch west wall, which had originally been constructed in sandstone. The rebuild in brick commences at the current ground level which means that the soil build up probably relates to the demolition of the south aisle. The trench returned along the south wall of the porch where the foundations of the south aisle were exposed by the contractors. This part of the trench was not seen by the author.

Two pieces of post-medieval roof tile, probably from the porch or nave roof, and two pieces of pottery were retrieved from the trench (see Appendix 1).

East Trench

The trench was dug to a depth of 1.30m below the existing external ground level and was 0.50m wide. Its base was 0.30m below floor level in the nave. The junction of the porch with the nave wall was not seen because a downpipe and drain were in the way (Pls. 6 and 7).

As on the west side of the porch the excavations revealed the junction of the earlier stone porch and the later brick rebuild, which coincided with the raised ground level.

At the south end of the trench four large, squared, blocks were exposed which ran along the south side of the porch wall (Pl. 8). The building contractors reported that a further three large sandstone blocks had been removed from the trench before the arrival of the archaeologist.

At the base of the trench was a mortary deposit 0.35-0.40m thick which is probably bedding for the aisle floor. Above this layer was a very mixed soil which was mostly redeposited topsoil.

Discussion

In spite of the small-scale works, monitoring of the excavations has confirmed the position of the aisle south wall. Part of the west wall, where it joins the south-west angle of the nave is still visible beneath the turf (Pl. 9) and an estimate of its extent based on the west wall thickness has been made, giving internal dimensions of 14.50m long and 3.60m wide (16.50m x 4.60m external) (Fig. 2). The four arches of the south aisle are of two sizes, the two eastern arches being wider and taller. It has been suggested that they are either of slightly different date in construction or that the south aisle was partly separated to form a chapel (CPW 1980).

The present south door to the church is Norman in style and probably contemporary with the chancel arch. It was probably used as the south aisle door and moved when the aisle was demolished. It may even have been moved from the nave when the aisle was originally constructed. There is also evidence of a blocked door on the north aisle wall immediately opposite the south door.

The windows in the two eastern arcades are Perpendicular in style and similar to the window in the south wall of the chancel. Like the door they may have originally been part of the south aisle but perhaps were new when incorporated into the arcade blocking.

The stone porch, whose foundations survive beneath the brick walls may be contemporary with the demolition of the aisle and blocking of the arcade.

The excavations also exposed a small part of the original nave wall plinth, which runs beneath the filled in arcade. Tile retrieved from excavations is probably from the earlier porch roof or nave roof.

A provisional (very simplified) sequence of construction is proposed as follows and based on the surviving fabric. This does not preclude the possibility of earlier and intermediate phases

- Late Saxon church (chancel arch piers)
- Norman refurbishment (chancel arch, south door)
- 12-13th century south aisle (piers)
- tower 14-15th century
- 15th-16th century chancel
- ?15-16th century removal of south aisle
- construction of stone porch 15-16th century or later
- 18th century rebuild of porch, repair to tower and raising of nave roof
- 19th-20th century repairs
- 1911 repair to nave roof

Conclusion

Monitoring of the drainage trenches around the south porch has revealed evidence for the extent of the south aisle but more detailed examination of the fabric is required to obtain a clearer insight into the complex building history of this church.

Naomi Field
January 30th 2002

Acknowledgements

LAS is grateful to Mr Limentani (Marshall Sisson Architect) for providing additional background information. Illustrations were prepared by Mick McDaid and Naomi Field.

References

Foster C.W. and Longley T. 1924 (reprinted 1976) *The Lincolnshire Domesday and the Lindsey Survey*. Lincoln Record Society vol.19.

1980 Council for Places of Worship. *Burwell, St Michael, Lincolnshire*. Report submitted resulting from referral under the Pastoral Measure.

Archive Summary

colour photographs, LAS film no.01/60/12-21

correspondence

site plan

field notes

3 field sketch plans

Pottery Archive BSMC01

Jane Young

Lindsey Archaeological Services

context	cname	full name	form type	sherds	part	description	date
U/S	BL	Black-glazed wares	hollow	1	BS	.	17/18th
U/S	TB	Toynton/Bolingbroke wares	jar	1	base	int glaze	16/17th

Tile Archive BSMC01

Jane Young

Lindsey Archaeological Services

context	cname	full name	frags	weight	description	date
U/S	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	3	476	thin light firing tiles;? Date	prob pmed-emod
U/S	PNR	Peg, nib or ridge tile	1	397	hard red fabric	pmed-emod

THE FIGURES

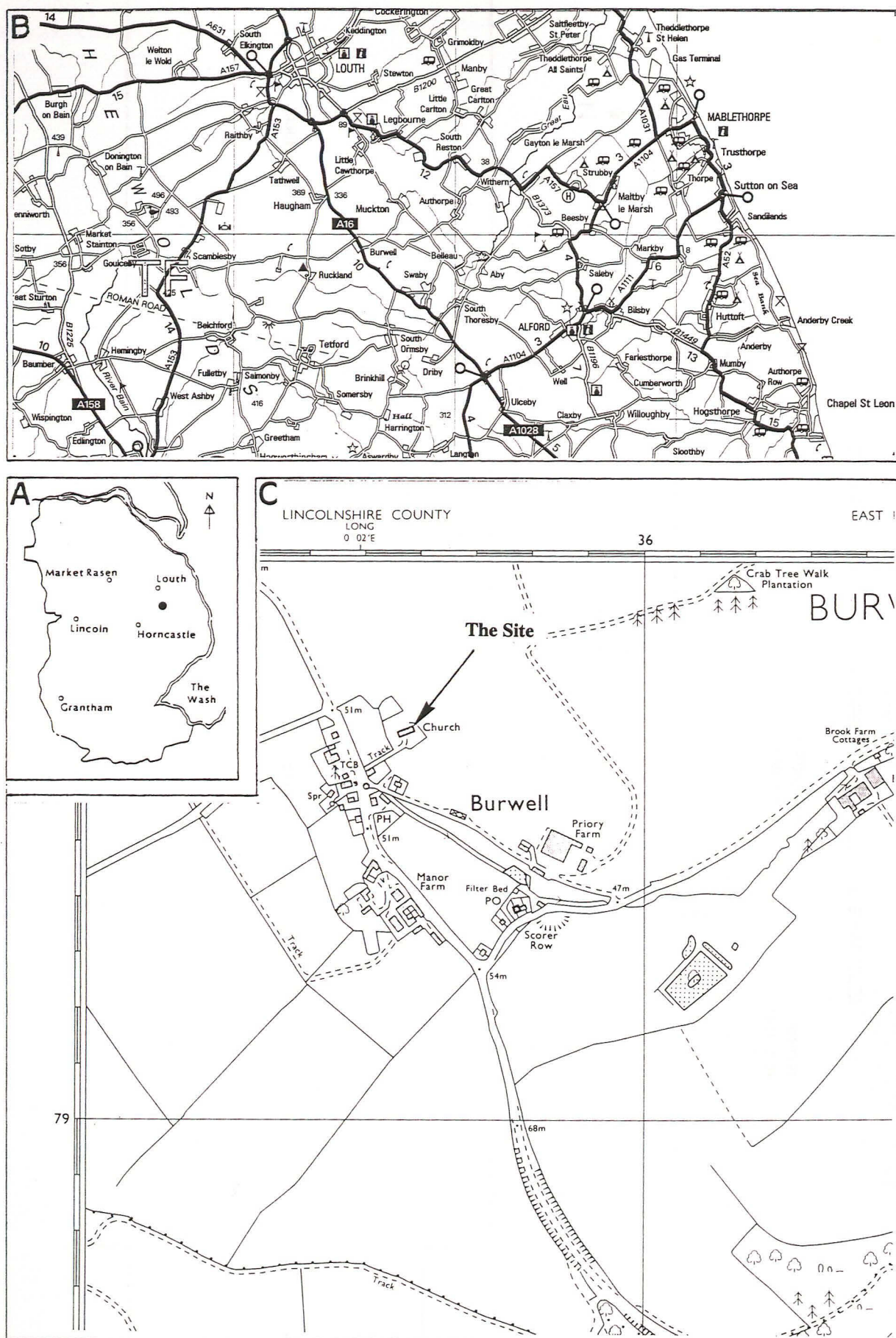


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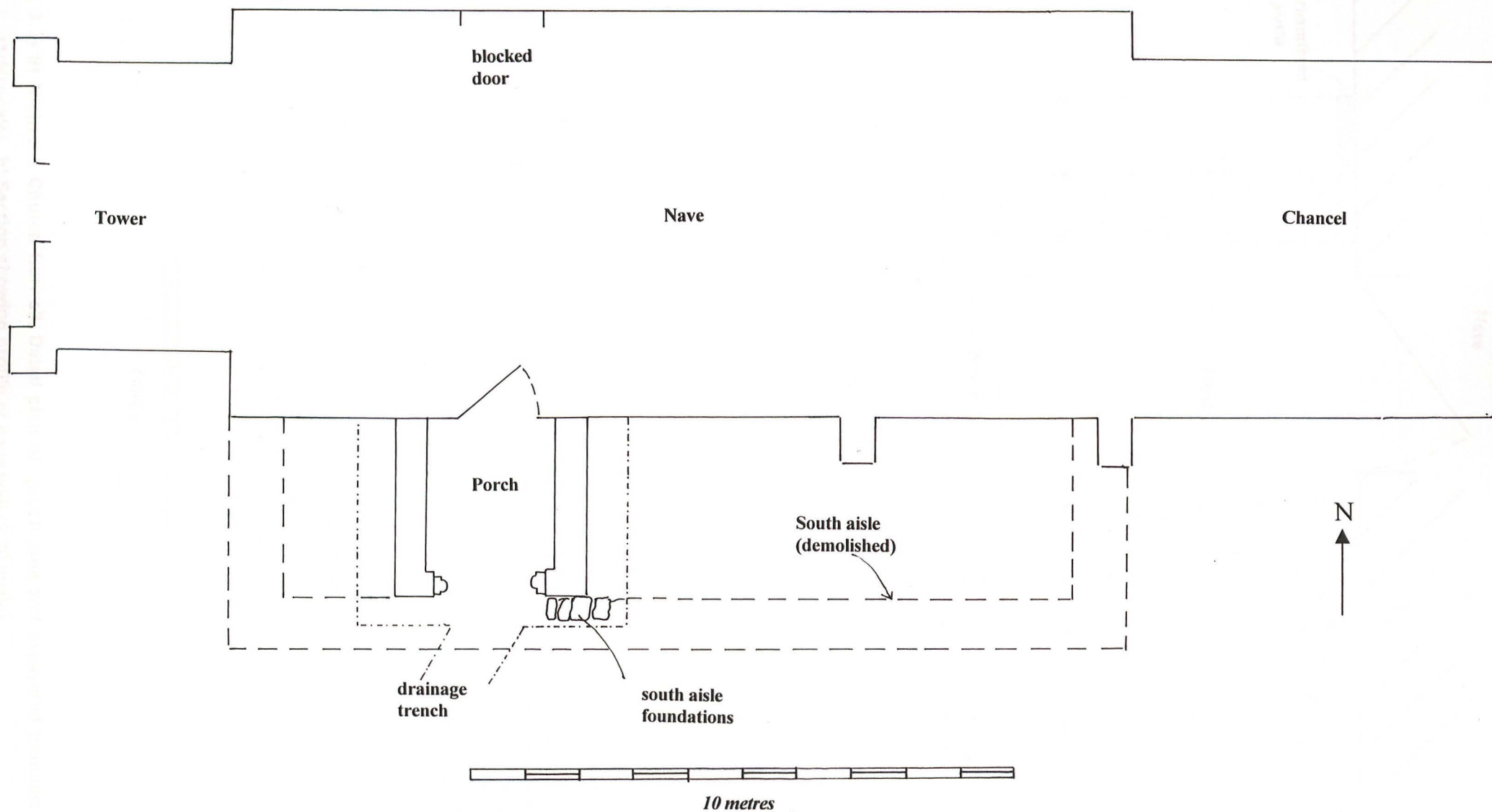


Fig.2 St Michael's Church Burwell. Sketch plan of church showing location of the monitored trenches (1:100 scale).

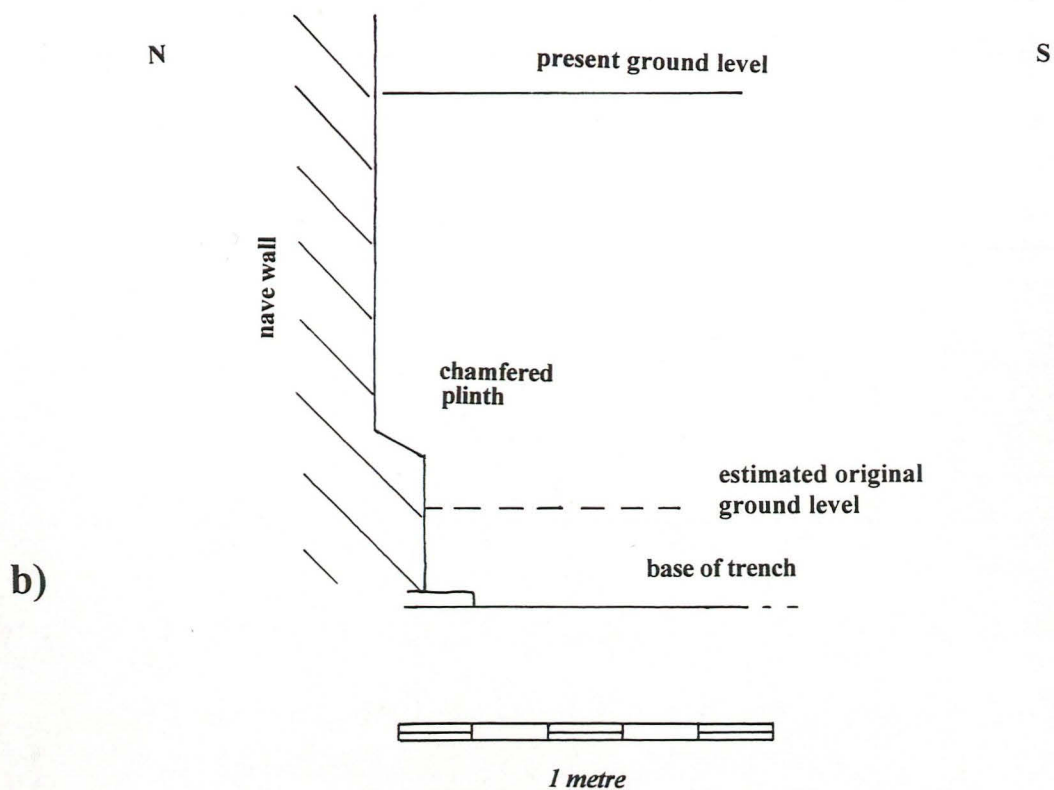
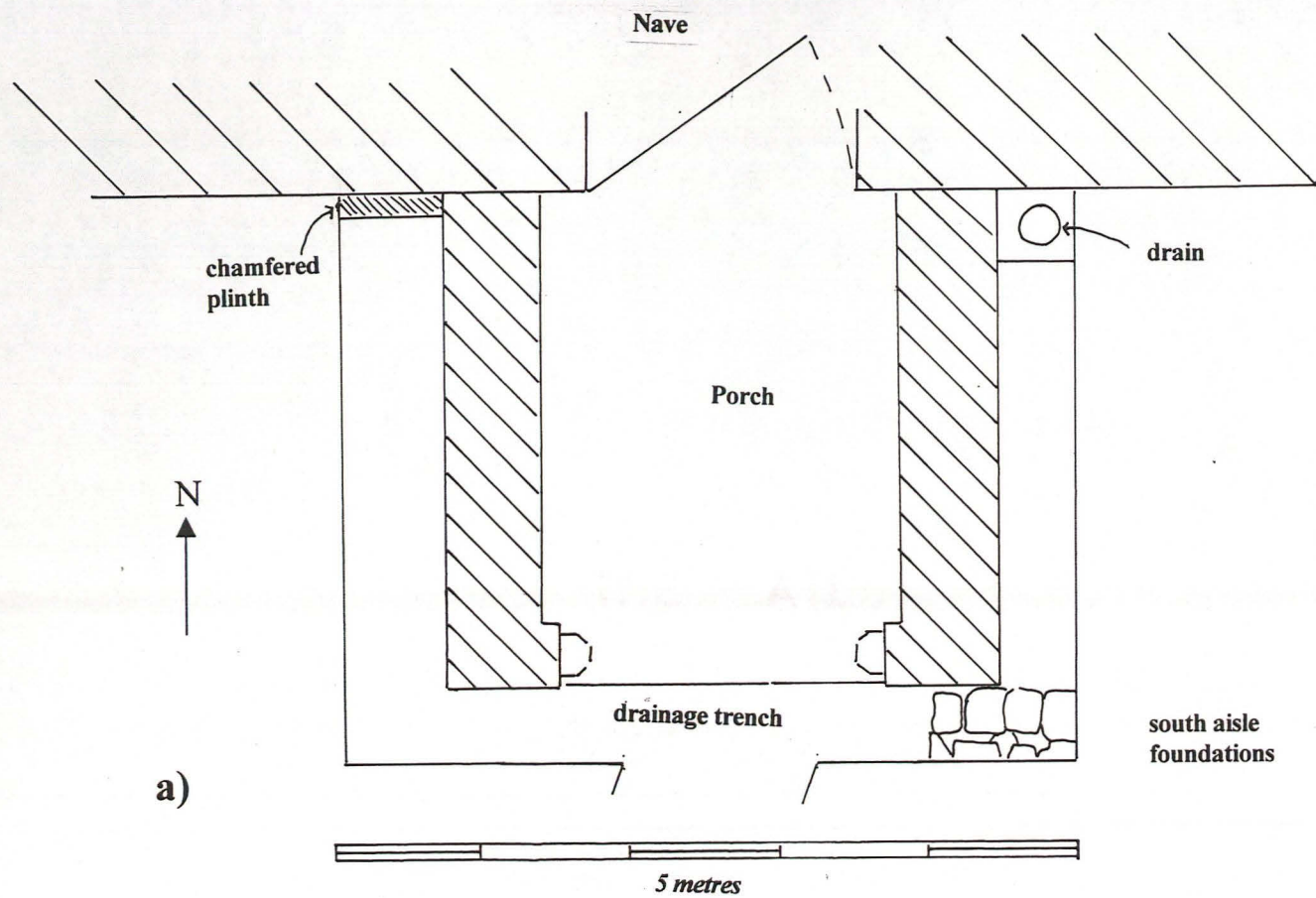


Fig. 3 a) St Michael's Church Burwell. Detail plan of porch area and excavated trenches (1:50 scale). b) Section showing profile of nave wall (1:20 scale)

THE PLATES



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Pl. 2 St Michael's church, Burwell, south elevation, looking west.





Pl. 3 The south porch.

Pl. 4 Drainage trench on west side of porch showing sandstone wall beneath the rebuild in brick.





PI. 5 Detail of west trench showing chamfered plinth of nave wall. The scale is resting on the offset footing, where the original ground surface must have been, indicating a soil build up of 1.1m.

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Pl. 9 Foundations of the south aisle west wall visible at the south-west angle of the nave.
Scales 0.50m and 0.20m.