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LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

**The Parish Church of Asterby St Peter  
Archaeological Excavation and Recording**

**NGR: TF 274 795**

TF 2689 7951

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND RECORDING**

**Report**

**for**

**Mr D. Dennis**

**December 1997**

*LAS Report NO 271*

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# The Parish Church of Asterby St Peter Archaeological Excavation and Recording

NGR: TF 274 795

Site Code: AST 97

LAS Report No. 271

LCRCC accn no 103.97

## Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services was commissioned by Mr D. Dennis to carry out archaeological recording at Asterby Church in accordance with Condition d) of the Historic Buildings Grant awarded by East Lindsey District Council in November 1995.

New drainage works were required to improve the disposal of rainwater from the roof as part of a programme of repair to the fabric of the church. The purpose of the recording was to ensure that any archaeological remains uncovered were appropriately recorded.

## The Site

Asterby is located in the Lincolnshire Wolds between Louth and Horncastle. The village is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as sokeland belonging to the manor of Belchford. Its place-name combines the Old English element *east* with the Scandinavian *-by* ending for homestead or settlement giving eastern homestead or settlement. Perhaps it was an outlier of Goulceby to its west which was part of the same manor at Domesday and clearly the larger settlement with a church and mill recorded.

The parish church of St Peter, Asterby was made redundant in 1981. It comprises a nave which had a north aisle added in the 13th century. This was demolished but the piers survive. A vestry was built in 1879 onto the north side of the nave, about half the length of the original aisle. The tower was rebuilt in 1900 but its lower stages are 14th century in date. The chancel was rebuilt in 1896.

## Method

Two drainage trenches were dug on the south side of the church leading from rainwater pipes and emptying into two soakaways. Four further drainage trenches were dug on the north side emptying into two more soakaways (Fig. 2). The trenches have been numbered in accordance with the numbering assigned by the architect to the rainwater pipes. Trenches 1-3 and 6 were excavated by the contractor and monitored by the archaeologist. Drainage trenches 4 and 5 were archaeologically excavated to the external limit of the demolished nave north wall and completed by the contractors (approx. 1m of Trench 4 and 4m length of Trench 5). Each trench was 400mm wide and up to 500mm deep allowing for the necessary fall to the drains. After the trenches were dug plastic pipes were laid on a bedding of gravel and connected to the traps at the base of the of the down-pipes.



The trenches were dug through the upper levels of the churchyard which mainly comprised a sandy mid-brown soil with a few flints and chalk fragments. No graves were encountered although a few previously disturbed human bones were found, and reburied (see below).

## **Results**

### **Trench 6**

A trench was dug north from the north wall of the tower leading to a circular soakaway (Pl. 1). A sandstone chamfered plinth course was exposed at the base of the tower below the modern ground level. A further stone course was exposed beneath the chamfered block (Pl. 2). The tower foundations extended below the base of the trench.

### **Trench 1**

A trench was dug south from the south wall of the tower turning south-west towards a circular soakaway (Pl. 3). A chamfered plinth, identical to that found on the north side of the tower was observed just above the existing ground level (Pl. 4). A further stone course was visible beneath the chamfered course and again the base of the trench did not reach the bottom of the tower foundations.

### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was dug south from the chancel, adjacent the south-east angle of the nave, running between a vault to the west and a line of gravestones (Pl. 5). The trench turned south-east towards the soakaway (Pl. 6). A skull was found next to the vault but was not in situ. Arrangements were made for its reinterment.

### **Trenches 3 and 4**

Trench 3 ran north-west from the rainwater pipe on the north side of the chancel towards a soakaway north of the vestry which was also joined by Trench 5 (Pl. 7).

A short trench less than 1m in length was dug north of the rainwater pipe at the north-east angle of the vestry to join Trench 3 (Pl. 8). It was at this point that blocks of sandstone were encountered at a depth of c.300mm beneath the ground surface (Fig. 2). There was a possible chamfer on the block which straddled the junction between Trenches 3 and 4 suggesting that this was the external face of a wall. The stones continued west from Trench 4 along Trench 3 for 1.20m. There was a gap of 1.30m along the south side of the trench and 0.70m on the north side which appeared free of stones. The soil recorded in this part of the trench contained mortar flecks and was light brown in colour, lighter than the soil in the rest of the trench. Beyond the gap further stonework was recorded crossing the trench at an angle and extending north-west for 1.80-2m (Pl. 9).

The gap in the stonework may represent the internal angle of a building which was crossed diagonally by Trench 3. The mortar flecks may have come



from soil contained within a foundation trench for the walls or were possibly the remnants of an internal floor surface.

Trench 3 continued for a further 4.50m to meet the soakaway which was located 4m north of the north-west corner of the vestry.

A single piece of Saxon pottery was found in the topsoil together with a piece of medieval pottery.

### **Trench 5**

Trench 5 was dug north from the rainwater pipe at the junction between the nave and vestry west wall. The vestry west wall is 2.5m long and immediately beneath the topsoil were two foundation courses of stone blocks beneath the wall projecting west by c.0.20m, and 0.17m north of the north wall (Pl. 11). They were sitting on less distinct stonework which extended west beyond the limits of the trench and northwards 2.30m beyond the vestry north wall (Pls. 11 and 12). There was a possible edge to the stonework at this point although further loose stones were found in the trench beyond. Unlike the vestry foundations the stones were irregular in shape and much thinner. In character they were similar to the foundations recorded in Trench 3.

A patch of mortar was recorded amongst the stones just west of the vestry wall foundations.

Trench 5 extended 2.30m beyond the limit of the stonework to meet the soakaway and Trench 3.

### **Discussion**

Despite the limited scope of investigations it has been established that the foundations for an earlier building lie beneath and north of the existing vestry. The size of the trenches allowed only a glimpse at these earlier remains and makes interpretation only tentative. It is possible that the foundations are those of the demolished north aisle. However, this would make its width c.5.50m (to the external face of the wall) and the external width of the present nave is only 6.50m. Normally one might expect an aisle to be about half the width of the nave; in this case perhaps closer to 3.5m.

The wall west of the vestry also requires explanation. The standing fabric shows that the aisle extended the full length of the nave (Pls. 10 and 13) so the foundations located half way along the nave probably belong to an earlier structure, unless the aisle was divided into two chapels and the foundations represent an internal dividing wall. Alternatively, it is possible that the stonework found in Trench 5 was an external wall and that the foundations represent the west wall of a north transept. The presence of a transept which pre-dates the 13th century aisle raises the possibility that a church of some status existed on this site.

Only the excavation of a trench dug north from the west end of the nave would determine whether the aisle at the west end of the nave was part of the structure already discovered.

Naomi Field  
December 31st 1997



## Figures

Fig. 1 Asterby. Site location

Fig. 2 Asterby church. Plan showing position of drainage trenches. Reduced from plan supplied by the architect.

Fig. 3. Features recorded on the north side of the church. (N. Field/  
M.McDaid)

## Plates

Pl. 1 Trench 6 and soakaway running north from tower

Pl. 2 Trench 6 at junction with tower north wall showing chamfered plinth

Pl. 3 Trench 1 running south from tower

Pl. 4 Trench 1 at junction with tower south wall showing chamfered plinth

Pl. 5 Trench 2 at junction with chancel east of stone capped brick vault

Pl. 6 Trench 2 and soakaway running south from chancel south wall

Pl. 7 Trench 3 to north of chancel looking north-west

Pl. 8 Trench 4 at north-east angle of nave running into trench 3 with remnants of sandstone foundations in Trench 3

Pl. 9 Trench 3 west of Trench 4 showing sandstone foundations

Pl. 10 General view of blocked north aisle arcade with vestry to left, showing Trench 5

Pl. 11 Trench 5 running along vestry west wall showing two courses of stepped foundations for the vestry overlying foundations of an earlier structure

Pl. 12 Trench 5 showing sandstone foundations, possibly for transept, north of the vestry

Pl. 13 North wall of nave showing aisle arcade, blocked left and open right with former vestry

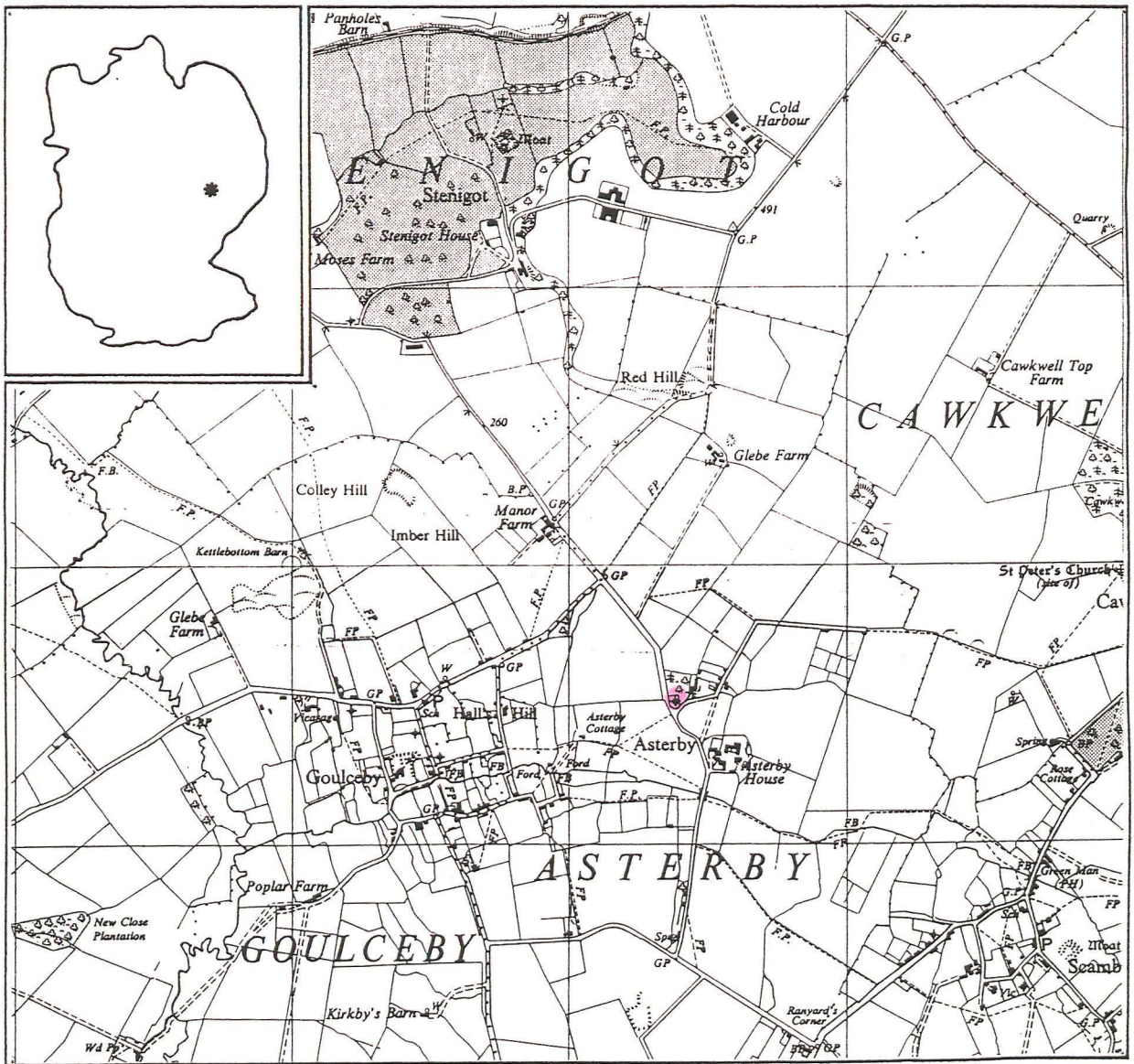
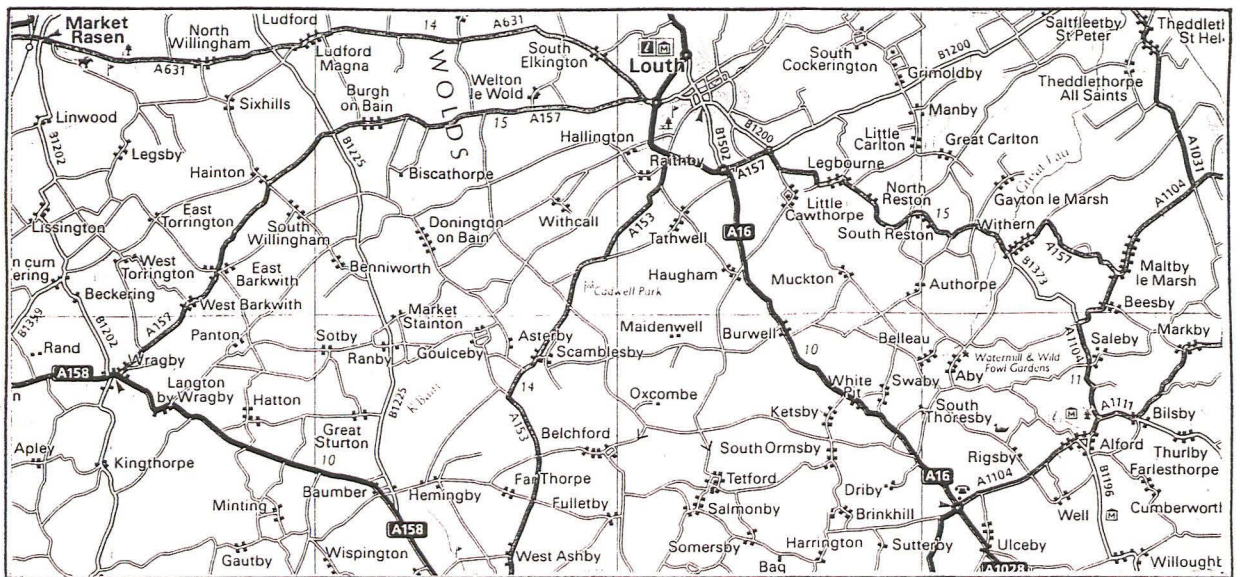
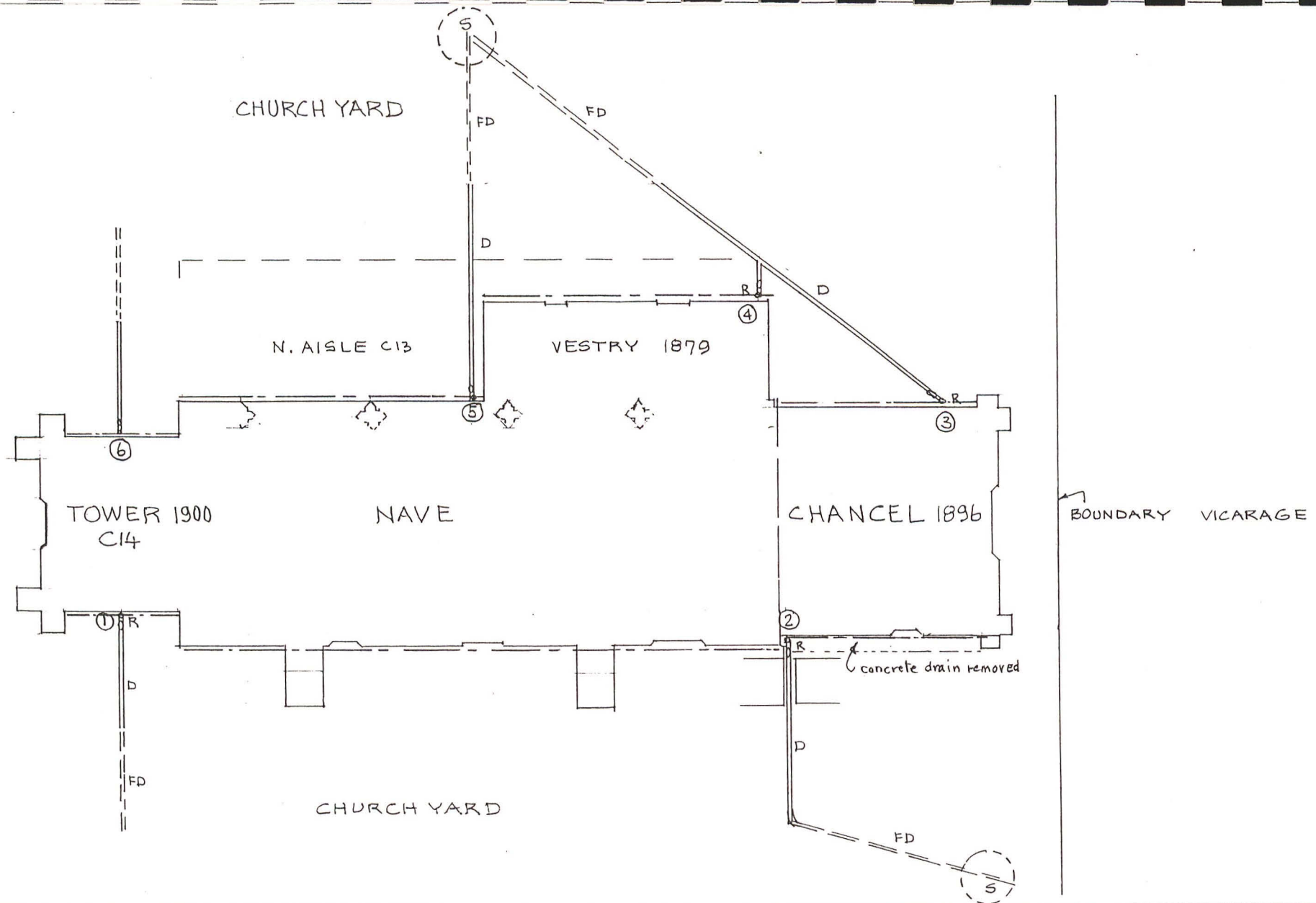


Fig. 1 Asterby. Site location





ST PETER, ASTERBY - REDUNDANT 1982

Fig. 2 Asterby church. Plan showing position of drainage trenches.  
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August 1996

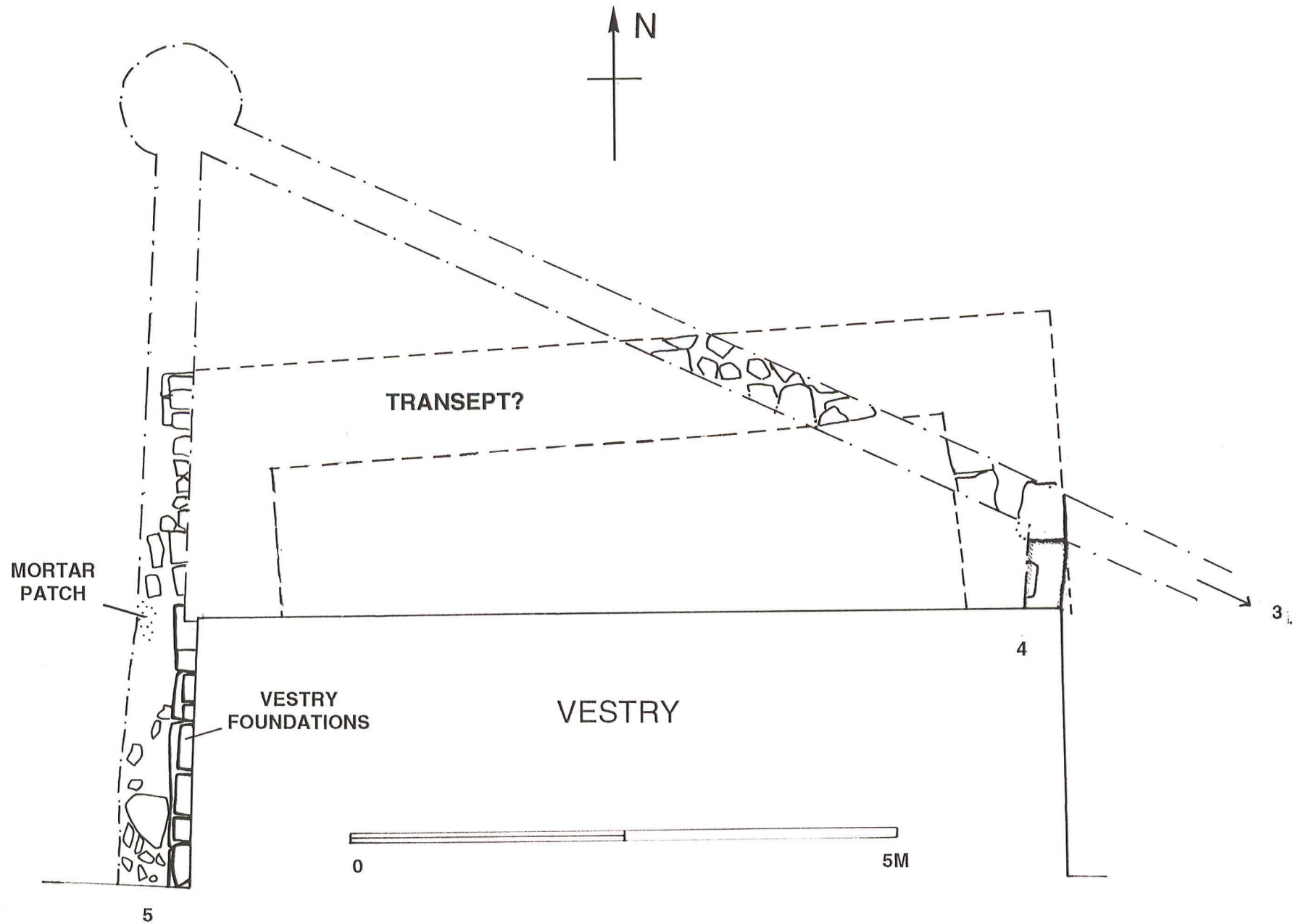


Fig. 3. Features recorded on the north side of the church. (N. Field/  
M.McDaid)





**Pl. 1 Trench 6 and soakaway running north from tower**

**Pl. 2 Trench 6 at junction with tower north wall showing chamfered plinth**







**Pl. 3 Trench 1 running south from tower**

**Pl. 4 Trench 1 at junction with tower south wall showing chamfered plinth**







**Pl. 5 Trench 2 at junction with chancel east of stone capped brick vault**



**Pl. 6 Trench 2 and soakaway running south from chancel south wall**





**Pl. 7 Trench 3 to north of chancel looking north-west**



**Pl. 8 Trench 4 at north-east angle of nave running into trench 3 with remnants of sandstone foundations in Trench 3**





**Pl. 9 Trench 3 west of Trench 4 showing sandstone foundations**

**Pl. 10 General view of blocked north aisle arcade with vestry to left, showing Trench 5**







**Pl. 11 Trench 5 running along vestry west wall showing two courses of stepped foundations for the vestry overlying foundations of an earlier structure**

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**Pl. 13 North wall of nave showing aisle arcade, blocked left and open right with former vestry**