

CHURCH OF ST PETER AND ST PAUL, WIDMERPOOL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
2013

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SUMMARY

- During 2013, Trent & Peak Archaeology was commissioned by David Brooke on behalf of the PCC to carry out archaeological recording during groundwork at the church of St.Peter and St. Paul, Widmerpool (Figure 1, 2).
- The proposed work comprised excavation within the churchyard of a north extension Area 01 (c.5000mm x 5300mm externally) against the north aisle and north-east corner of the tower. This was followed by the excavation of a service trench comprising Areas 02-04 running from the north extension southwards past the west side of the tower.
- The site of St.Peter and St.Paul's Church, Widmerpool (Grade II*), sits on the side of a hill at c.59m O.D. (SK62870 26205), c.11km to the south of Nottingham. No church is recorded at Widmerpool in Domesday. The earliest reference to the presence of a church at Widmerpool is the appointment of a rector, Ralph of Northampton, in 1272.
- During the 19th century significant changes occurred to the church. In the early 1830's the church was restored including the spire and porch, while the nave was re-roofed and more windows added. Unfortunately following a lightning strike in 1836 the spire was demolished leaving only the tower. Between 1888 to 1895 the church was again subject to restoration at a cost of £10,000 funded by Major G.C. Robertson. A new porch, chancel and vestry were added and the nave re-roofed.
The present church comprises a chancel with north organ chamber and south vestry, nave with clerestory, north and south aisles, tower (of late 14th century date) with north and south aisles, and a south porch.
- Within area 01 the main stratigraphic sequence comprised topsoil over various clay loam subsoil layers to a depth of c.1m. Many of the subsoil layers appeared mixed in character which may reflect some re-deposition possibly in relation to construction of the original medieval church on site.
- A residual undiagnostic prehistoric flint flake represents possible rare evidence of such activity within the area of Widmerpool. Unfortunately insufficient material was found to indicate the nature or extent of such activity.
- The remains of four *in-situ* articulated skeletons in varying stages of completeness were exposed and recorded in 01 at depths as little as 0.55m. Condition of the bone was generally poor and fragmentary, including skulls and the ends of long bones preventing any detailed identification within the field. All skeletons lay on a west to east orientation, between 1m to 4.5m to the north of the north aisle wall. Given their shallow depth, lack of coffins and no up standing post-medieval to modern grave-markers these probably represent burials of medieval date. The presence of a skull in the west facing section suggests further medieval burials are likely to extend across the churchyard to the north of the existing church.
- Along the area of the drainage trench the most significant discovery was the presence of an apparent late 18th-early 19th century brick burial shaft. Unfortunately this had been subject to previous disturbance including removal of any upstanding grave-marker and burial, possibly during later 19th century refurbishment work on the tower.
- Although the groundwork was limited in depth and area the watching-brief findings were significant in indicating that the potential for below ground archaeological remains are high in the form of possible medieval burials on the north side of the church and possible post-medieval graves (with their grave-markers/headstones removed during the 19th century church works), lying close to the west side of the tower.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project Manager was L Elliott. On-site recording was by P.Webb and L. Platt. The report was prepared by L.Elliott, Peter Webb and Laurence Platt. Further much appreciated help on the project was given by David Brooke.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. During 2013, Trent & Peak Archaeology was commissioned by David Brooke on behalf of the PCC to carry out archaeological recording during groundwork at the church of St.Peter and St. Paul, Widmerpool (Figure 1, 2).

1.2. The investigation was carried out following appropriate English Heritage guidelines and the *Code of Conduct of The Institute for Archaeologists*.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1. The objective of the archaeological work can be stated as:

- To ensure that any archaeological information present in the areas undergoing destructive removal of deposits are recorded appropriately and the results presented within a report (preservation by record).

2.2. The proposed work comprised:

- The excavation within the churchyard of a north extension (c.5000mm x 5300mm externally) against the north aisle and north-east corner of the tower.
- The excavation of a service trench running from the north extension southwards past the west side of the tower.

2.3. The groundwork was excavated by staff of the main contractor under the observation by the archaeologist (watching brief).

2.4. The recording was to result in 'the preparation of a report and ordered archive', in line with the guidelines of the IFA Institute for Archaeologists, (Standard and Guidance: for an archaeological watching brief published October 1994, revised September 2001).

2.5. Given the depth and nature of the proposed work the likely archaeological potential identified for the groundwork comprised;

- Earlier church foundations
- Exposure of existing medieval church foundations
- Post medieval stone/brick burial vaults.
- Articulated and disarticulated human remains.
- Residual structural finds e.g. medieval glazed floor tile, medieval worked stone, moulded plaster, roof slates, lead came, window glass, gravestone fragments.

3. SITE BACKGROUND

3.1. History

3.1.1. The site of St.Peter and St.Paul's Church, Widmerpool (Grade II*), sits on the side of a hill at c.59m O.D. (SK62870 26205), c.11km to the south of Nottingham (Figure 1). The surrounding superficial geology includes Oadby (lias rich) diamicton, while the underlying bedrock comprises Barnstone Member Mudstone and Limestone (inter-bedded).

3.1.2. No church is recorded at Widmerpool in Domesday, although a Norman stone capital is said to be located near the tower (Leeds 2012, 5).

3.1.3. The earliest reference to the presence of a church at Widmerpool is the appointment of a rector, Ralph of Northampton, in 1272 (Leeds 2012, 1, 3). Taxation rolls indicate the annual value of the church was £13 6s 8d by 1291 (Godfrey 1907).

3.1.4. In 1594 the chancel was rebuilt by Richard Snowden rector (Cox 1912, 232; Whites 1832, 657).

3.1.5. Throsby described the church in the late 18th century as consisting of "a nave and two side aisles, with a plain spire steeple with three bells. It has a spacious chancel" (Throsby 1790, 80).

3.1.6. Stretton writing in the early 19th century described the church as consisting of a nave, two side aisles with octagon pillars 20 inches in diameter and pointed arcades (Robertson 1910, 119). Furthermore the church was constructed of blue limestone and had a neat spire of dressed gritstone.

3.1.7. During the 19th century significant changes occurred to the church. In the early 1830's the church was restored including the spire and porch, while the nave was re-roofed and more windows added. Unfortunately following a lightning strike in 1836 the spire was demolished leaving only the tower (Cox 1912, 232; Leeds 2012, 5).

3.1.8. Between 1888 to 1895 the church was again subject to restoration at a cost of £10,000 funded by Major G.C. Robertson (Pevsner 1979, 378; Leeds, 2012, 5). A new porch, chancel and vestry were added and the nave re-roofed.

3.1.9. The present church comprises a chancel with north organ chamber and south vestry, nave with clerestory, north and south aisles, tower (of late 14th century date) with north and south aisles, and a south porch.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1.1. All areas under going archaeological monitoring were given individual two digit area numbers. These comprised the north extension 01 and the drainage/service trench 02-04.

4.1.2. Excavation of the north extension and the drainage/service trench was carried out by the main contractor to the required depth, under archaeological monitoring.

4.1.3. All excavated areas were inspected for archaeological remains, cleaned where necessary and recorded both in plan and in section (by drawing at 1:20 scale and photograph).

4.1.4. All identifiable deposits/structural elements were given unique individual four digit context numbers e.g. 0001, 0002 etc. The total number of contexts assigned was twenty-two from 0001 to 0022.

4.1.5. All exposed surfaces and spoil was inspected for artefacts before removal from site. All saved artefacts were given individual three letter finds codes e.g. AAA, AAB.

4.1.6. All human remains found in the confines of the work were inspected, recorded appropriately and left on site for reburial.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Area 01 North Extension (Figures 3-6, Plates 1-3)

5.1.1. The main stratigraphic sequence within area 01 comprised topsoil over various subsoil layers (see table below). Many of the subsoil layers appeared mixed in character which may reflect some re-deposition possibly in relation to construction of the original medieval church on site.

Context	Interpretation	Description
0007	Topsoil layer (230mm thick)	Dark brown silty clay loam
0013-0014	Subsoil layer (500mm thick)	Mid-brown firm clay.
0008-0009	Subsoil layer (300mm thick)	Mid-brown firm clay with up to 20% white flecks
0010	Subsoil layer (600mm thick)	Mid-bluish/brown soft to firm clay with 5% white flecks.
0011-0012	Subsoil layer (140mm thick)	Mid-reddish/brown soft to firm clay with 20% mudstone and 3% white flecks.

In addition to this basic stratigraphic sequence a number of features/deposits were present.

Skeletons SK0001 to SK0004 (Figure 3, Plate 4)

5.1.2. The remains of four *in-situ* articulated skeletons in varying stages of completeness were exposed and recorded. Condition of the bone was generally poor and fragmentary, including skulls and the ends of long bones preventing any detailed identification within the field.

5.1.3. All skeletons lay on a west to east orientation. SK0001 lay in close proximity to the north-east buttress of the tower, while SK0002-4 lay c.3.5m- 4.5m to the north of the north aisle wall. The burials were present at depths as little as 0.55m cut into layers 0010 and 0011.

5.1.4. No visible grave cuts were present either in plan or section. This possibly reflects the immediate backfilling of the burials with the same subsoil material that the graves were cut into.

5.1.5. No coffin nails/coffin furniture was present suggesting the graves represented shroud burials which along with their shallow depth indicate a probable medieval date.

5.1.6. A fifth burial extending eastwards outside of 01 was suggested by the presence of an apparent *in-situ* skull in the west facing section.

Tower Buttress Foundation 0001/0002 (Figure 5, Plate 5)

5.1.7. The tower's north-east diagonal buttress foundation was partially exposed to depth of 0.7m within 01. The foundation, aligned north-east to south-west, protruded c.1.7m from the north-east corner of the tower. It was abutted by layers 0009 and 0010, while being partly overlain by layers 0014/0013.

5.1.8. The foundation was constructed from flat sub-rectangular to rectangular Lias Limestone slabs up to 0.9m long and 0.1m thick, bonded with a yellowish brown sandy mortar.

North Aisle Wall Foundation (Figure 7, Plate 2)

5.1.9. The existing north aisle wall foundation was partly exposed revealing up to three courses of sub-rectangular to rectangular Lias Limestone slabs up to 0.6m long and 0.13m thick cut into subsoil layers 0009/0010. Sitting on the foundation was a course of smooth-faced dressed rectangular ashlar

blocks c.1m x 0.34m in size with a moulded course above. Where exposed the walling above appeared to comprise brick which had been covered with rendering in imitation of ashlar.

North Aisle Wall Buttress Foundation 0004 (Figure s 8-9, Plate 6)

5.1.10. Partly exposed in the west facing section of 01 was the west buttress foundation of the north aisle wall. This revealed the buttress foundation to consist of over seven courses of 19th century brick (over 0.6m in depth) cut into layers 0010/0011. Above the foundation lay a similar plinth of ashlar with moulded course as present along the north aisle wall.

Drains 0003 and 0006

5.1.11. Two modern drains were present running east-west across Area 01. This included a shallow drain 0003 cut alongside the wall of the north aisle. The second drain 0006 lay 2m north of the aisle wall. Cut from below the topsoil the drainage trench 0006 contained loose stones with a plastic pipe at the base.

Finds

5.1.12. A single small broken undiagnostic flint flake was recovered from subsoil layer 0009 indicating the layer to be redeposited as well as hinting at the possibility of prehistoric activity within the area.

5.1.13. No other artefacts of note were recovered from Area 01 which was sterile of finds and disarticulated human bone.

5.2. Area 02 Drainage Trench (Plate 7, Figure 10)

5.2.1. Area 02 consisted of a 6m long x 0.6m wide x 0.6 deep section of excavated drainage trench running south-west to north-east.

5.2.2. The main stratigraphic sequence within area 02 comprised topsoil 0015 over subsoil layer 0016 (see table below). Subsoil layer 0016 appeared mixed in character which may reflect some re-deposition possibly in relation to construction of the original medieval church on site and later burial.

Context	Interpretation	Description
0015	Topsoil layer (220mm thick)	Dark brown silty clay loam
0016	Subsoil layer (over 380mm thick)	Yellowish-brown clay loam

Finds

5.2.3. No features were present in this section of the trench with the exception of a modern plastic ribbed drainage pipe. No articulated or disarticulated human remains or artefacts were present.

5.3. Area 03 Drainage Trench (Plates 8-9, Figure 11)

5.3.1. Area 03 consisted of a 17m long x 0.6m wide x 0.8m deep section of excavated drainage trench running north-south to the west of the tower.

5.3.2. The main stratigraphic sequence within area 03 comprised topsoil 0015 over subsoil layer 0016 (see table below). Subsoil layer 0016 appeared mixed in character which may reflect some re-deposition possibly in relation to construction of the original medieval church (tower) on site and later burial.

Context	Interpretation	Description
0015	Topsoil layer (200mm thick)	Dark brown silty clay loam
0016-0017	Subsoil layer (over 600mm thick)	Yellowish-brown clay loam

Brick Burial Shaft 0018/19 (Plates 8-9, Figure 11)

5.3.3. The remains of a brick shaft were exposed 7m from the north end of Area 03 and less than 2m from the tower. It comprised two east-west running walls (0018 and 0019) set 1.1m apart. Both walls rested on a brick floor base and were two bricks thick, surviving to a height of 0.76m. The shaft was only present in the east facing section, with the majority of the shaft extending westwards beyond the limits of the trench. The bricks present within the shaft appeared to be hand made measuring 9¼" (230mm) x 4½"(111mm) x 2¾"(70mm).

5.3.4. No covering slab was present over the shaft which was cut from below the topsoil. No human remains were present in the shaft which had been apparently backfilled with a mixture of clay loam, tile (Plate 11), yellow sand and large stone fragments (0020).

5.3.5. The shaft resembles a shallow burial shaft often present below table top tombs. The stone fragments found within may originate from the 19th century rebuilding, which may indicate when the contents of the shaft were relocated and any above ground cover was dismantled.

Finds

5.3.6. No artefacts of note were recovered from Area 03 which was sterile of finds and articulated/disarticulated human bone.

5.4. Area 04 Drainage Trench (Plate 10, Figure 12)

5.4.1. Area 04 consisted of a 3.4m long x 0.6m wide x 0.7m deep section of excavated drainage trench running north-west to south-east to the south of the tower.

5.4.2. The main stratigraphic sequence within area 04 comprised topsoil 0015 over subsoil layer 0016/0017 (see table below). Subsoil layer 0016/0017 appeared mixed in character which may reflect some re-deposition possibly in relation to construction of the original medieval church (tower) on site and later burial.

Context	Interpretation	Description
0015	Topsoil layer (210mm thick)	Dark brown silty clay loam
0016-0017	Subsoil layer (over 480mm thick)	Yellowish-brown clay loam

Finds

5.4.3. No artefacts of note were recovered from Area 04 which was sterile of finds and articulated/disarticulated human bone.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. The prehistoric flint flake although undiagnostic represents possible rare evidence of such activity within the area of Widmerpool. Unfortunately insufficient material was found to indicate the nature or extent of such activity.

6.2. The presence of a number of apparent layers of disturbed subsoil on the north side of the church (Area 01) may relate to redeposition of material connected to both levelling of the site prior to construction of the church and the spoil from excavation of foundation trenches.

6.3. The four burials within Area 01 given their shallow depth, lack of coffins and no up standing post-medieval to modern grave-markers probably represent burials of medieval date. These were cut into the redeposited layers in Area 01 suggesting the layers are earlier medieval in date.

6.4. The presence of a skull in the west facing section of Area 01 suggests further medieval burials are likely to extend across the churchyard to the north of the existing church. Their survival suggests little subsequent post-medieval to modern burial disturbance has occurred across this area. This was indicated by the lack of disarticulated bone recovered from Area 01 (with large quantities of such bone typically found in well used parish church graveyards).

6.5. Of note was the exposed brick buttress foundation for the north aisle. The buttresses of the north aisle are not shown on a plan of the church for 1836 (Winter 1834-6). It is therefore possible they may have been added during the rebuilding of 1888-1895.

6.6. Along the area of the drainage trench the most significant discovery was the presence of the apparent late 18th-early 19th century brick burial shaft. Unfortunately this had been subject to previous disturbance including removal of any upstanding grave-marker and internal burial, possibly during later 19th century refurbishment work on the tower.

Archaeological Potential

6.7. Although the groundwork was limited in area and depth the watching-brief findings were significant in indicating that the potential for below ground archaeological remains are high in the form of possible medieval burials on the north side of the church and possible post-medieval graves (with their grave-markers/headstones removed during the 19th century works), lying close to the west side of the tower.

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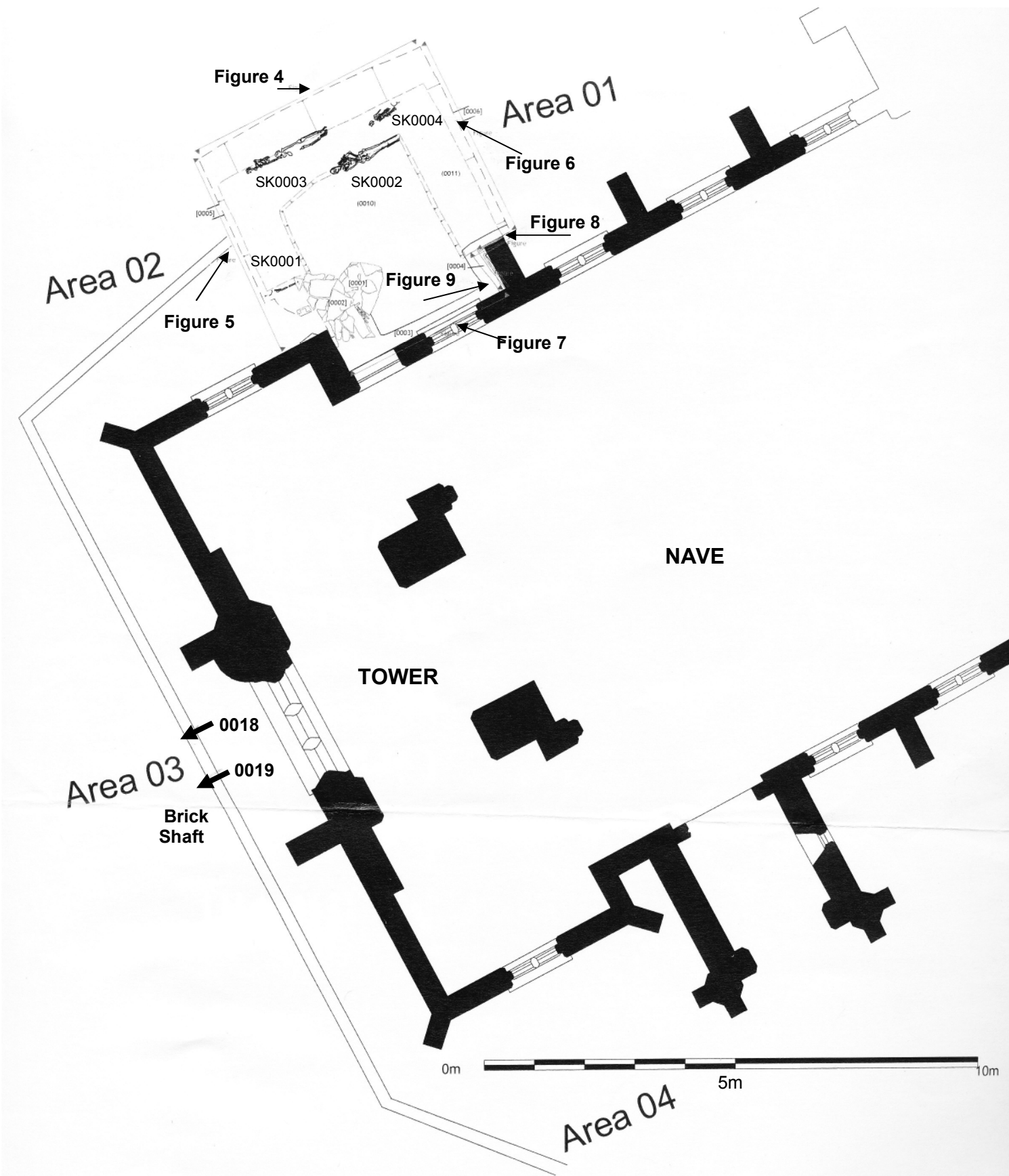


Figure 3: Areas 01 to 04 in plan

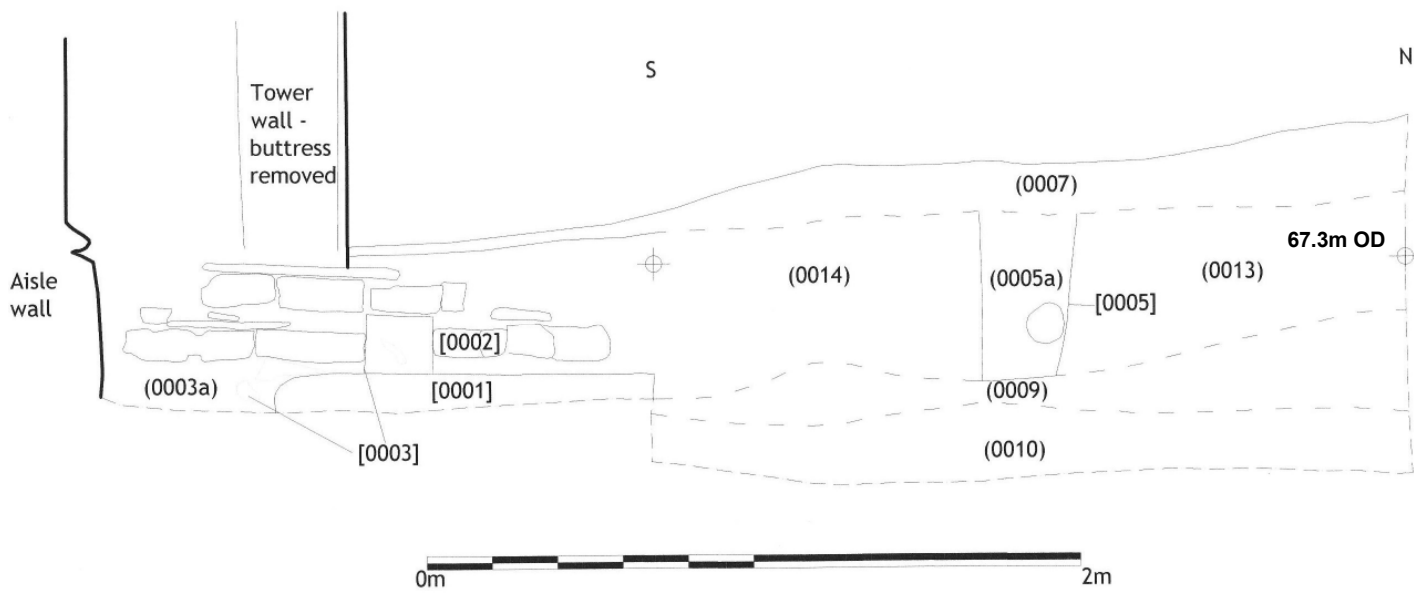
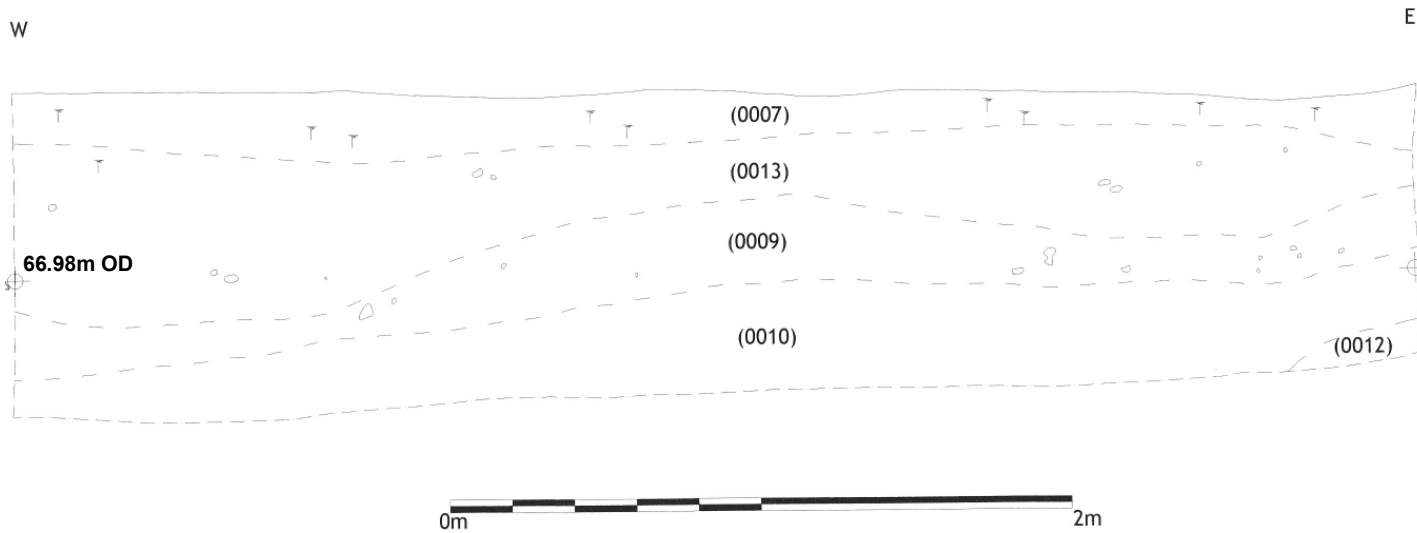


Figure 4: South facing section Area 01 (Top)

Figure 5: East facing section Area 01 (Bottom)

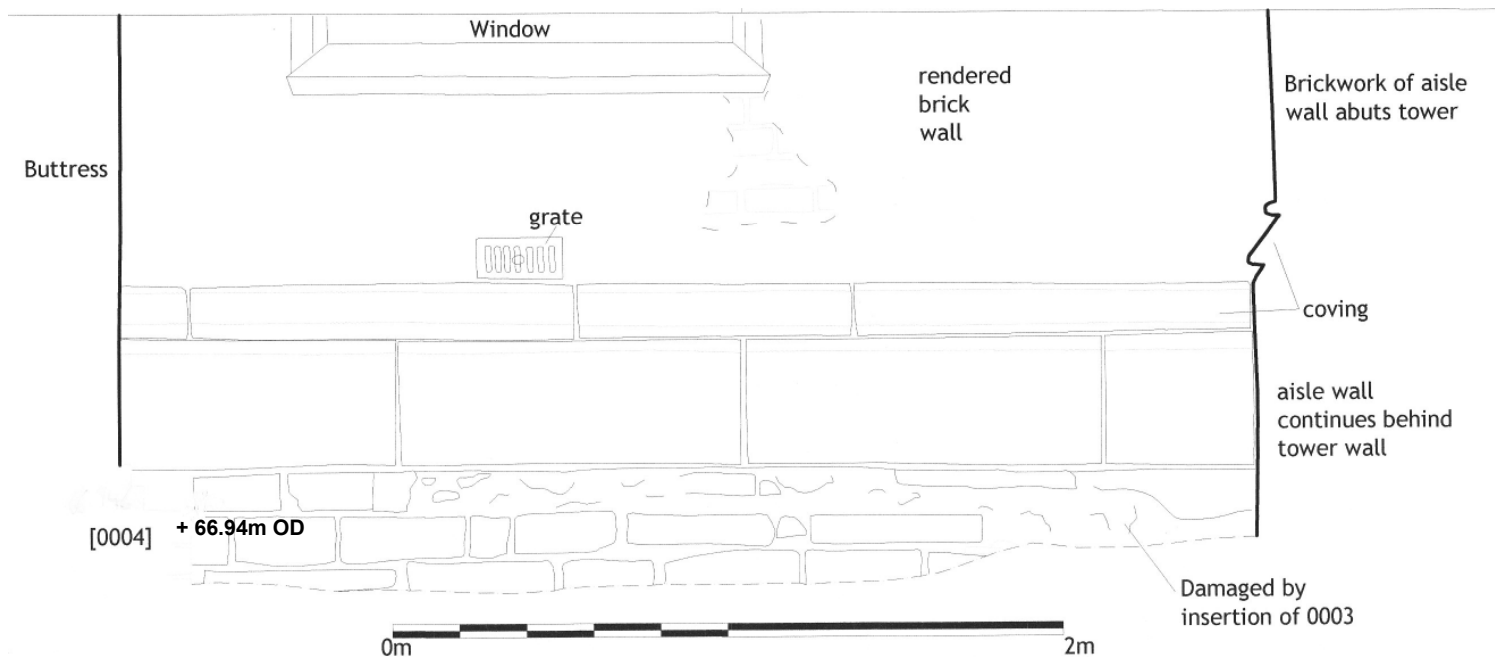
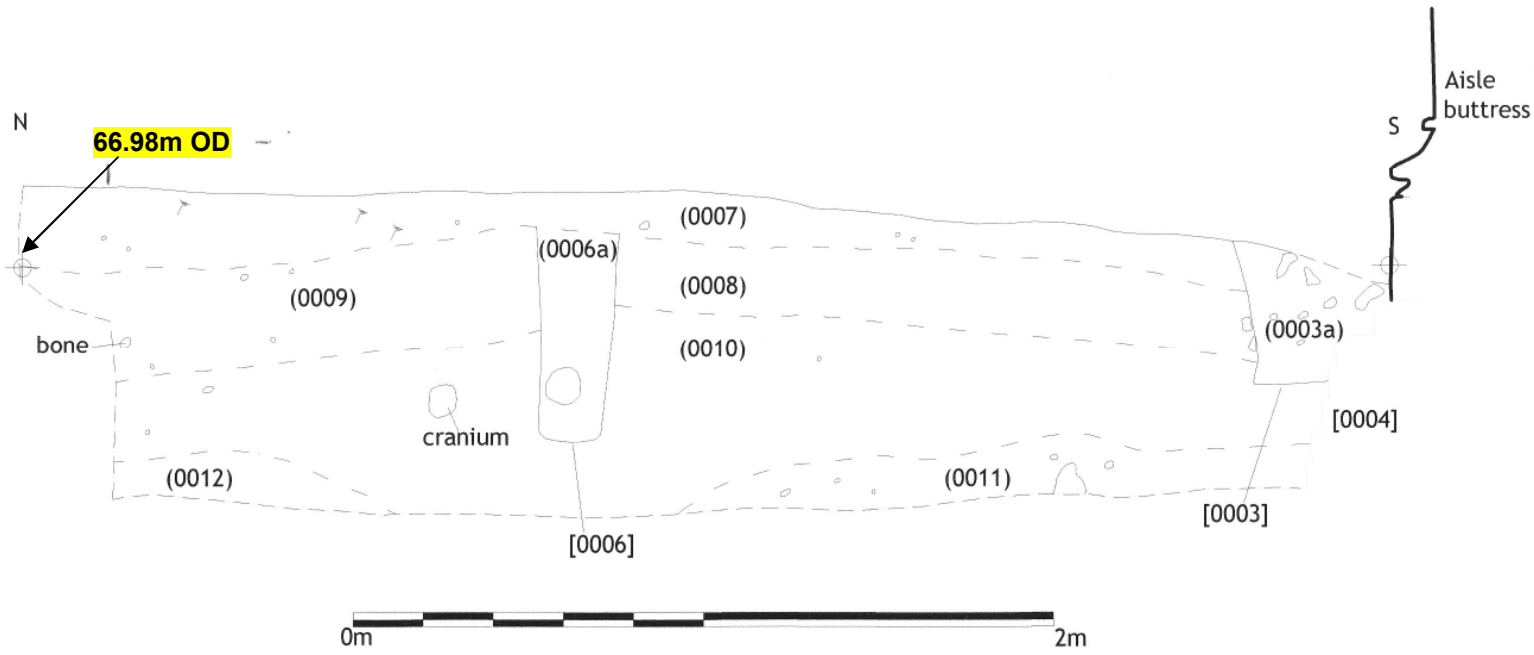


Figure 6: West facing section Area 01 (Top)

Figure 7: North facing elevation of north aisle wall Area 01 (Bottom)

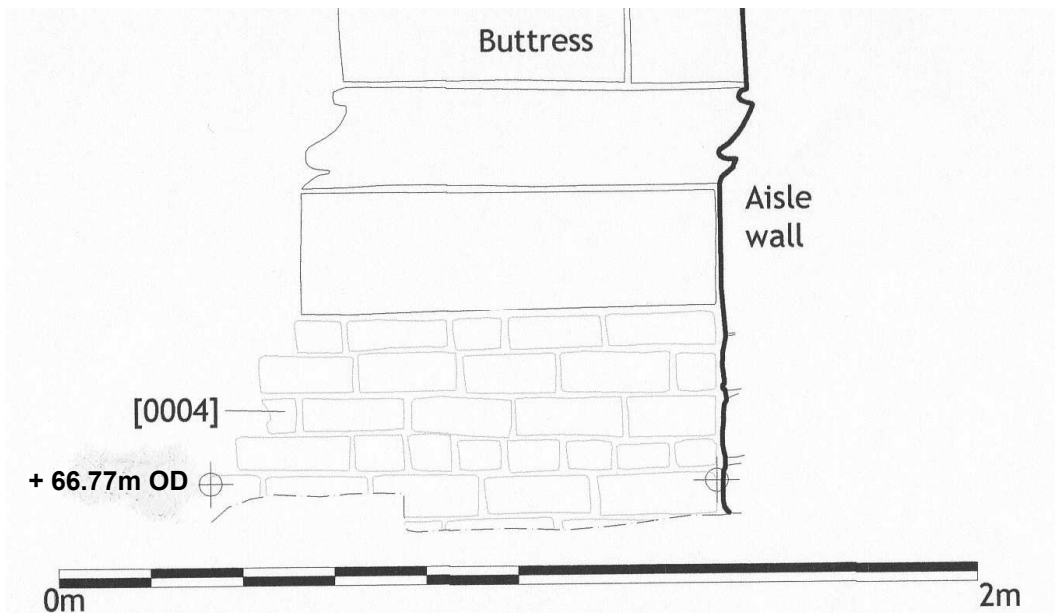
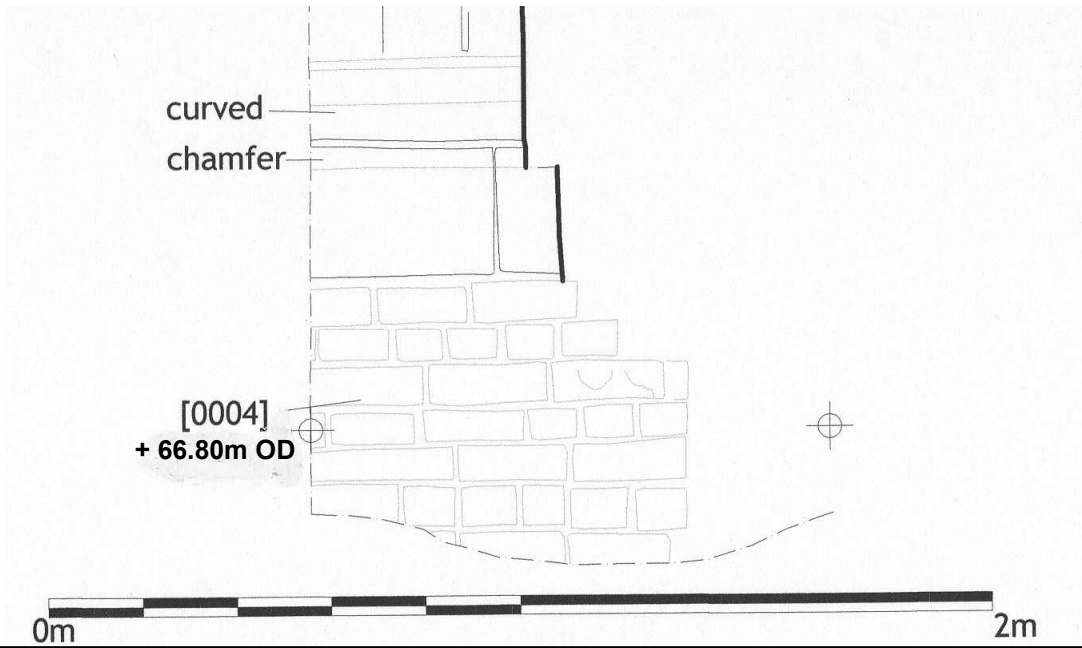


Figure 8: North facing elevation of butters foundation 0004 (Top)

Figure 9: West facing elevation of butters 0004 (Bottom)

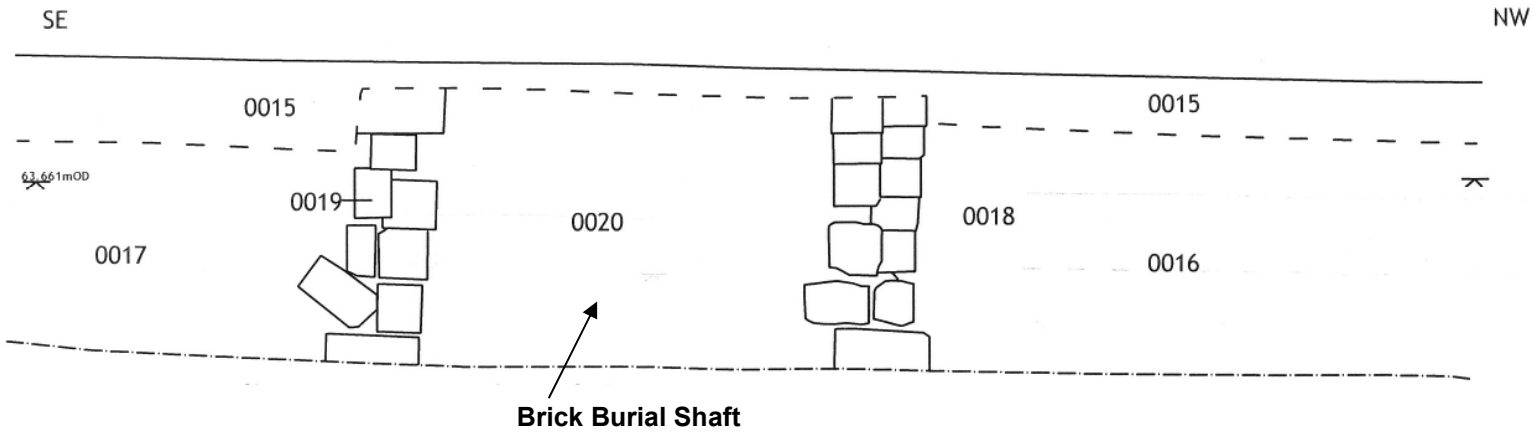
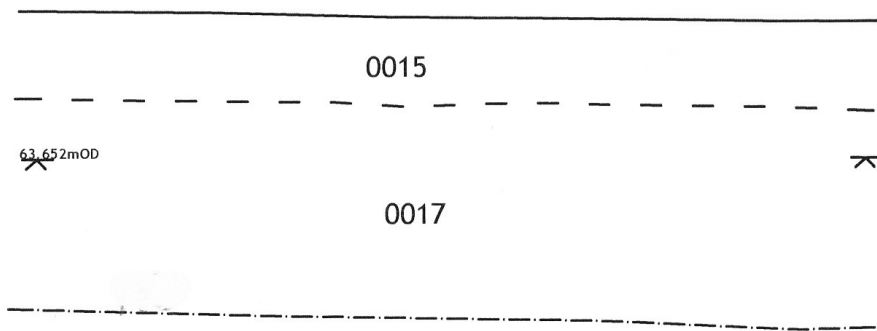


Figure 10: Representative North facing section Area 02 (Top)
Figure 11: Representative East facing section Area 03 (Middle)
Figure 12: Representative South-west facing section Area 04 (Bottom)



Plate 1: Area 01 looking south-east, showing north aisle with buttresses.



Plate 2: Area 01 looking south, showing brick buttress foundation 0004, stone diagonal tower buttress 0003 and the stone foundations of the north aisle.



Plate 3: Area 01 looking north-east, showing south-facing section.



Plate 4: Area 01 showing skeleton SK0002 aligned east-west.



Plate 5: Area 01 looking west, showing stone diagonal tower buttress 0003.



Plate 6: Area 01 looking south (left) and east (right), showing brick buttress foundation 0004.



Plate 7: Area 02, north-west facing section. Looking south-west.



Plate 8: Area 03 east-facing section showing brick burial shaft 0018/0019.



Plate 9: Area 03, overall view showing base of brick burial shaft. Looking south.



Plate 10: Area 04 overall view with modern drain at eastern end. Looking south-east.

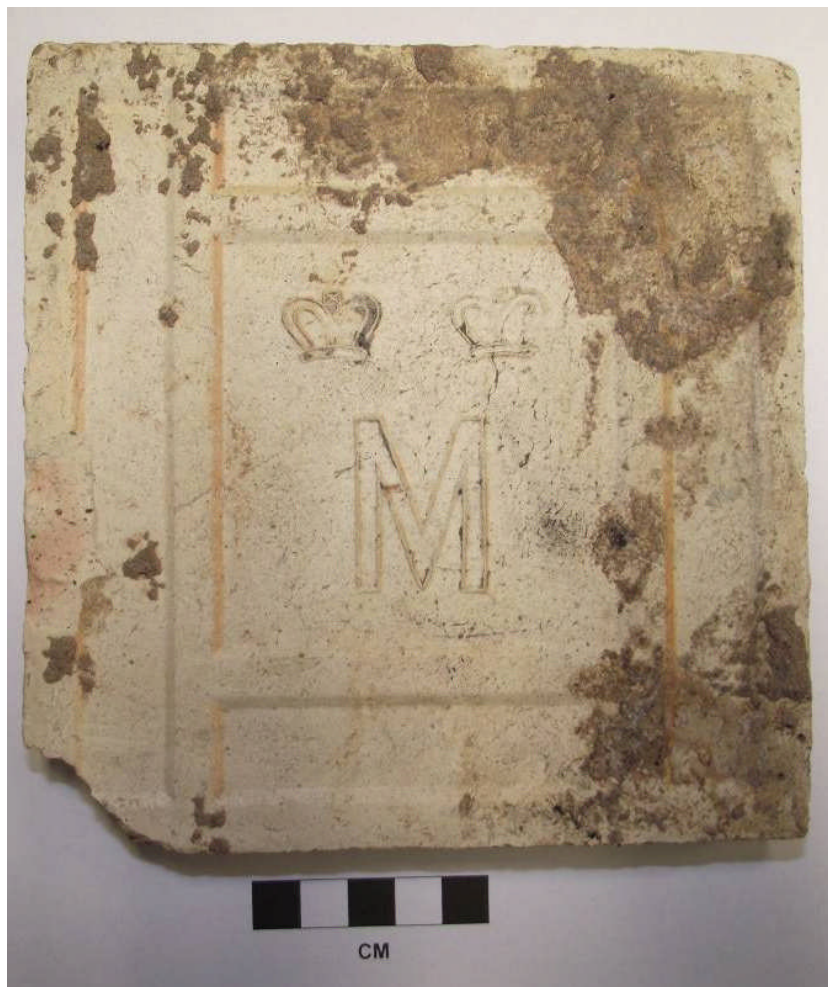
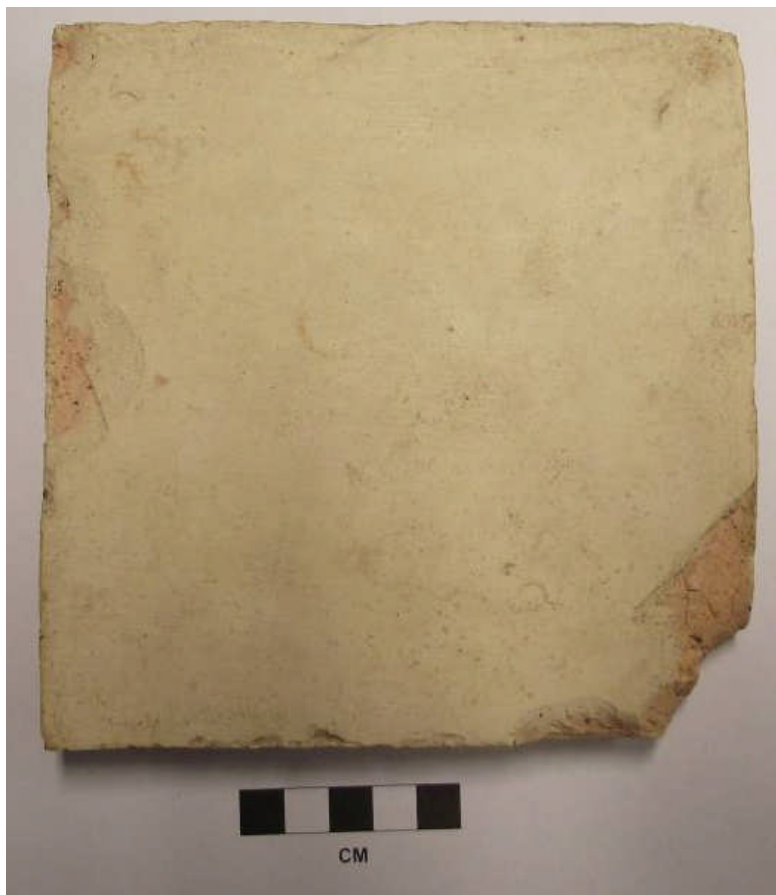


Plate 11: Area 03 plain unglazed tile with makers mark on reverse (large M below two crowns). Found within brick burial shaft 0018/0019.