

DOCUMENT VERIFICATION

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St Mary Stratford Bow Church, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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Watching Brief on Drainage Repairs

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	Name & Title	Signature	Date
Text Prepared by:	Ashley Pooley		27/4/07
Graphics Prepared by:	Dave Harris		28/6/07
Graphics Checked by:	Peter Moore	<i>Peter Moore</i>	13/7/07
Project Manager Sign-off:	Peter Moore	<i>Peter Moore</i>	16/7/07

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Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd  
Unit 54  
Brockley Cross Business Centre  
96 Endwell Road  
London  
SE4 2PD

**An Archaeological Watching Brief on Drainage Repairs at St Mary  
Stratford Bow Church, London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

**Site Code: BQW06**

**Central National Grid Reference: TQ 3765 8295**

**Written and Researched by Ashley Pooley  
Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, July 2007**

**Project Manager: Peter Moore**

**Commissioning Client: Parochial Church Council of St Mary and Holy  
Trinity**

**Contractor: Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited  
Unit 54 Brockley Cross Business Centre  
96 Endwell Road  
Brockley  
London  
SE4 2PD  
Tel: 020 7732 3925  
Fax: 020 7732 7896**

**Email: [pmoore@pre-construct.com](mailto:pmoore@pre-construct.com)  
Web: [www.pre-construct.com](http://www.pre-construct.com)**

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July 2007**

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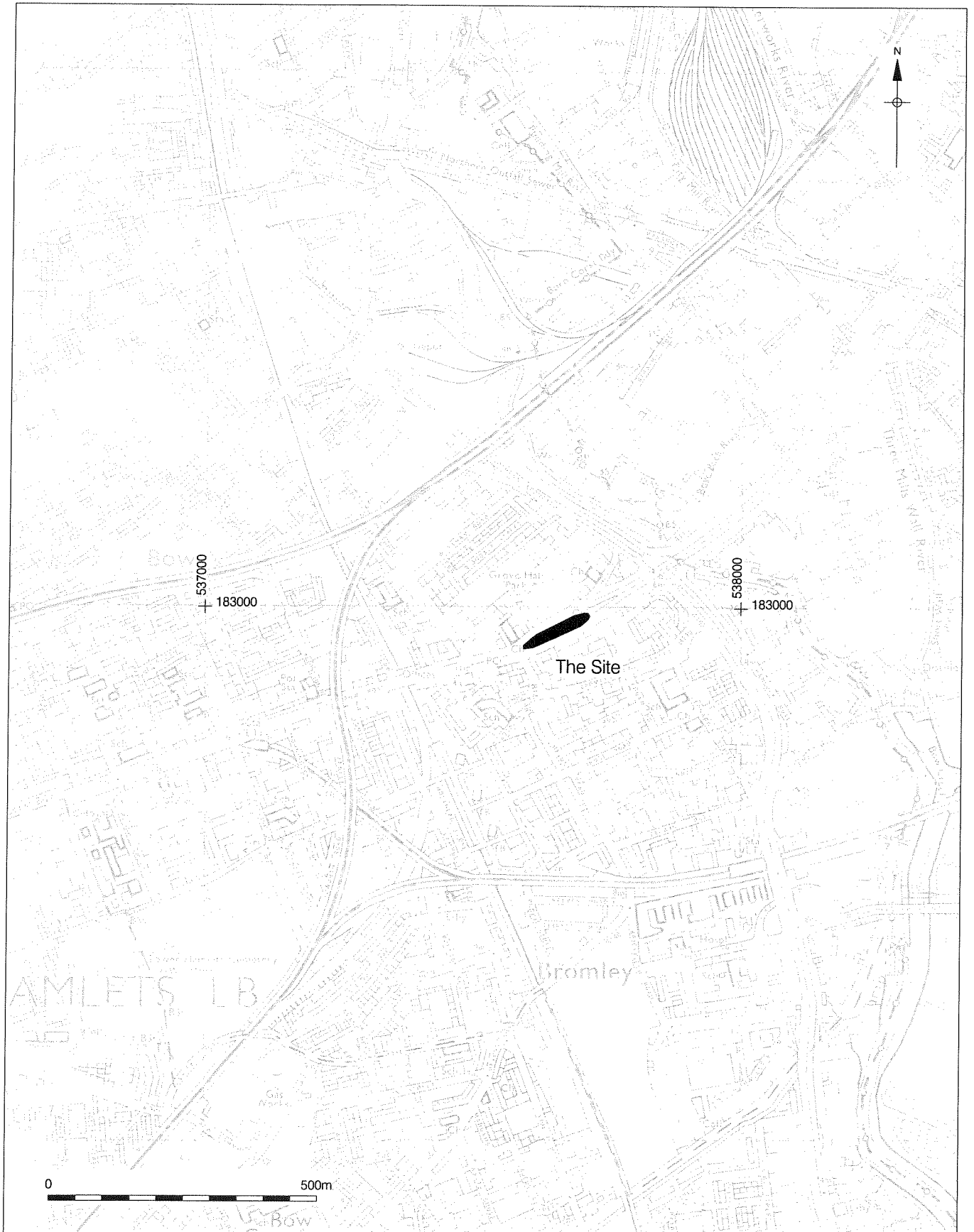
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# 1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 During drainage repairs at St Mary Stratford Bow Church, the excavation of a pipe trench around the footprint of the church building entailed the disturbance of potentially archaeological deposits. Consequently a watching brief was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited on these works. The churchyard is situated on a long narrow island in the middle of Bow Road, just to the West of the Bow Bridge Flyover, overlooking the west bank of the River Lea (fig 1). The work was commissioned by John Woodcock, Richard Griffiths Architects, on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of St Mary and Holy Trinity, Bow.
  
- 1.2 Disarticulated human remains were recovered, whilst a single intact interment was encountered just outside the western doorway of the church.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report details the methodology and results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd in St Mary Bow Churchyard, prompted by repairs and improvements to the drainage system serving the church. The site's central National Grid Reference is TQ 3765 8295. The fieldwork was conducted in January and February 2007 by the author.
- 2.2 The churchyard is located on an island within Bow Road in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, just to the west of the Bow Bridge Flyover (fig 1). The pipe trenches extended for a total length of approximately 75.00m, around the southern, western and northeastern sides of the church building.
- 2.3 The churchyard has been the subject of an archaeological desk-based assessment (Barefoot and Holden, 2006) and a further Written Scheme of Investigation (Moore 2006).
- 2.4 John Woodcock of Richard Griffiths Architects commissioned the project, on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of St Mary and Holy Trinity, Bow. The author conducted this watching brief, and Peter Moore managed the project, both on behalf of Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited.
- 2.5 The completed archive comprising written and drawn records will be deposited with the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre.
- 2.6 The site was allocated the site code BQW06.



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Figure 1  
Site location  
1:10 000 at A4

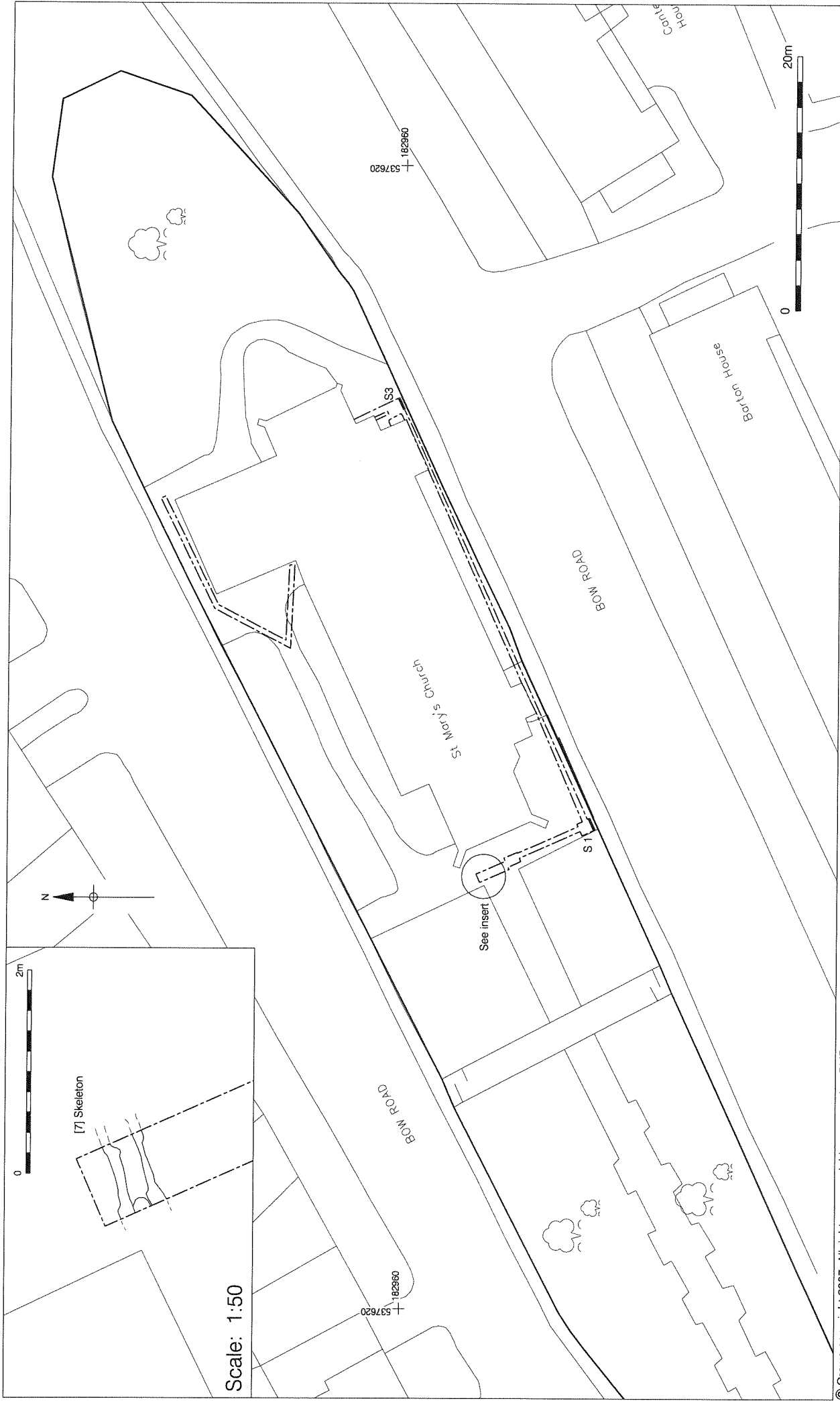


Figure 2  
Trench Location  
1:400 at A4

### 3 DOCUMENTATION

3.1 This investigation followed the parameters and methodologies set out in:

- Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists 2004, "Guidance Note 1: Archaeological requirements for works on churches and churchyards".
- Church of England / English Heritage, 2005, "Guidance For Best Practice For Treatment Of Human Remains Excavated From Christian Burial Ground In England"
- Diocesan Advisory Committee Certificate, Reference: 07.11(i)/03.06(A 1), 15<sup>th</sup> June 2006
- English Heritage, 1990, "Management of Archaeological Projects"
- English Heritage (GLAAS), revised June 1998, Archaeological Guidance Papers:
  - "3 Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork In London",
  - "4: Archaeological Reports",
  - "5: Watching Briefs"
- Institute of Field Archaeologists, revised 2001, "Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs".



## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The archaeological and historical background is discussed in full in the desk-based assessment (Barefoot and Holden, 2006) and the written scheme of investigation (Moore, 2006). A summary is provided below.
- 4.2 Both of these studies concluded that the potential for encountering remains of the prehistoric to Anglo-Saxon periods was low. However, since the present church building is medieval with various post-medieval repairs and alterations, it was considered that there was a high potential for encountering remains of these periods, related either to the various building episodes or to burials within the churchyard.
- 4.3 The church was originally built after 1311 as an outlying chapel of ease to the parish of Stepney. The population of the Bromley area grew as a result both of the construction of Bow Bridge in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century and its position on the River Lea, providing communication with Hertfordshire and Essex to the north and the Thames Estuary to the south. Whilst a Benedictine priory church existed nearby, represented by the exiguous remains of St Leonard's Church, as a monastic church for a community of nuns it was not under the jurisdiction of the diocese of London, necessitating the inconvenient use of St Dunstan's parish church.
- 4.4 The first burials are attested in 1497, a delay explained by St Dunstan's jealously guarding important sources of revenue (in the form of benefactions and bequests), particularly from an area that might well have rivalled the wealth of more centrally-placed parts of the parish. St Mary's was consecrated as an independent parish church in 1730. The tower partially collapsed in a storm in 1829, whilst a state of near dereliction followed before its partial destruction in World War II. This varying prosperity is reflected in phases of partial repair, renovation and rebuilding alongside retention of elements of its earlier building episodes.
- 4.5 As well as the church itself other, secular buildings are known to have stood in the vicinity of the churchyard, including a number of post-medieval tenement buildings and a tavern in the western churchyard and a market building in the eastern graveyard. These are assumed to have been demolished in 1825, when the churchyard was expanded east and west, but lay outside the area of the current groundworks. However, during extensive repairs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a temporary iron church was constructed just to the west of the present building, remains of which might well survive.

## 5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The groundworks entailed the excavation of two pipe trenches, one located to the south and west of the church and a second located to the northeast. Two manholes were dug to the southwest and southeast of the church building. Existing parts of the drainage system were re-used to connect these two stretches. As it was impractical to record a continuous section of the trench, a methodology of recording selected representative sections was adopted, and a plan produced showing the locations of any archaeologically significant remains (fig 2).
- 5.2 All deposits were excavated by hand with the author in attendance throughout. The western and southern pipe trench measured approximately 0.40m wide and up to 0.80m deep, whilst the northeastern measured approximately 0.40m wide and up to 0.50m deep. Both manholes measured approximately 1.00m from north to south and 1.00m from east to west, with the southwestern being 0.95m deep and the southeastern 0.55m deep.
- 5.3 Upon encountering human skeletal material, the brief was to ascertain whether the remains uncovered were intact and *in situ* or disarticulated and disturbed. In the latter case, bones were gathered and placed in secure storage awaiting their eventual return to the parish authorities and their subsequent reburial. If the former were found, an alteration of the drainage design was considered to be the optimum course of action.

## 6 SUMMARY OF THE STRATIGRAPHIC SEQUENCE

- 6.1 Due to the groundworks effectively being split into two, the two parts will be discussed separately with remarks about correlations between the two trenches being left until last.
- 6.2 The southern and western trench was the longest and deepest, and gave most information about what lies below the ground (fig 2). The earliest deposit encountered was light greyish brown silty sand [3] at 8.82m AOD, which contained disarticulated human bone fragments and is assumed to be a graveyard deposit dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its thickness is unknown as it was only partially exposed in section. Above this lay a yellowish brown silty sand layer [2] = [5] encountered between 9.27m AOD and 9.20m AOD, which again contained disarticulated human bone. This was in turn overlain by modern topsoil [1] = [4] encountered at between 9.57m AOD and 9.50m AOD (fig 3).
- 6.3 Just to the west of the western door of the church building, part of a skeleton [8] was uncovered at a height of 8.55m AOD. Only the pelvic and upper thigh region was exposed along with the fingers, which were placed over the pelvis (fig 2). The head would have been located to the west and the feet to the east, in accordance with usual Christian practice. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to assign a gender to the burial and no grave cut could be identified, presumably the consequence of much later disturbance in this area.
- 6.4 The northeastern part of the drainage trench, being the shallowest part of the excavations, revealed only two very recent deposits. The earliest layer [7] was similar in character to modern topsoil layers [1] and [4] and was encountered at 9.37m AOD. The earlier deposit was overlain by a layer of brick rubble [6], encountered at 9.55m AOD, which provided the bedding and make-up for a tarmac path round the church.

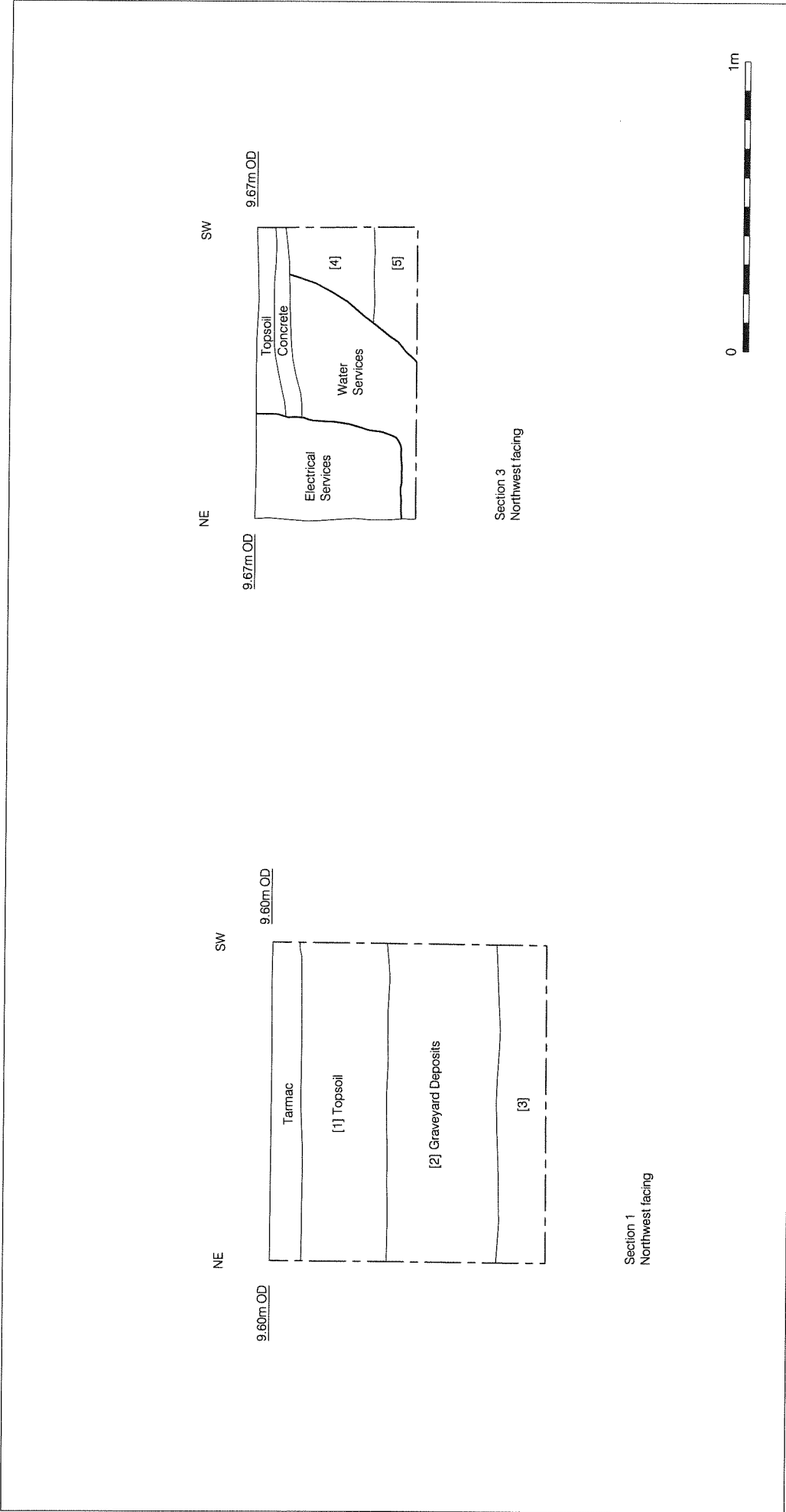


Figure 3  
 Sections 1 & 3  
 1:20 at A4

## 7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This watching brief demonstrated that both articulated and disarticulated human remains are present in the churchyard. In addition the watching brief demonstrated the upper sequence of layers, their significance within the graveyard sequence and the heights (both AOD and relative to the present ground surface) that articulated human skeletons are likely to be encountered.
- 7.2 Three significant archaeological horizons appear to be present across the site. Firstly, there is a layer of topsoil, 0.30 to 0.40m thick, represented by contexts [1], [4] and [7], and present everywhere except the paved area at the front of the church. Secondly, underneath this there is a disturbed layer, approximately 0.40m thick and represented by contexts [2] and [5], which appears to be overburden of the graveyard. The heavily disturbed character of the deposit is due to the repeated digging and re-excavation of the burial ground through time. Finally, below this, is a horizon, represented by context [7], where intact human burials might be expected to occur.

## **8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 8.1 The author would like to thank John Woodcock of Richard Griffiths Architects for commissioning this piece of fieldwork, Garnet Kirton and John Hoath of CEL Roofing Ltd for their help and co-operation on site, Rev. Michael Peet for his knowledge of local history, and Peter Moore of PCA Ltd. for his project management.

## 9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barefoot, I. and Holden, S. 2006. *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of Land at Bow Church, London Borough of Tower Hamlets*. PCA: Unpublished Report.

Moore, P. 2006. *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief on Drainage Repairs at St Mary Stratford Bow Church, London Borough of Tower Hamlets*. PCA: Unpublished Report.

## APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Context No.	Context Description
1	Soft to friable very dark brownish grey sandy silt (30:70) with moderate plastic and polystyrene fragments, occasional bone, pot, clay pipe and CBM, and frequent very rounded to sub-rounded flint pebbles (up to 0.15m) and frequent root action. <b>Modern topsoil.</b>
2	Friable mid yellowish brown silty sand (20:80) with occasional animal bone and disarticulated human bone, and moderate CBM and root action. <b>19<sup>th</sup> century graveyard overburden.</b>
3	Friable light greyish brown silty sand with moderate roots, CBM, mortar fragments, disarticulated human bone fragments and rounded and sub-rounded flint pebbles (up to 0.15m.) <b>19<sup>th</sup> graveyard deposit.</b>
4	Description as [1.] <b>Modern topsoil.</b>
5	Description as [2.] <b>19<sup>th</sup> century graveyard overburden.</b>
6	Loose to friable mid reddish grey brick rubble with occasional roots. <b>Modern bedding/made ground for tarmac path</b>
7	Soft to Loose mid to dark greyish brown sandy silt (20:80) with moderate CBM fragments and pea grit, and occasional brick fragments.
8	Supine partial skeleton head to west, feet to east. <b>19<sup>th</sup> century interment.</b>



## APPENDIX 2:

### OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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**OASIS ID: preconst1-26474**

#### Project details

Project name Archaeological Watching Brief on Drainage Repairs at St Mary Stratford Bow Church

Short description of the project Drainage repairs undertaken at St Mary Stratford Bow Church entailed partial disturbance of deposits within the churchyard as a result of the excavation of a pipe trench around the footprint of the existing church building. Disarticulated human remains were recovered, whilst a single intact interment was encountered just outside the western doorway of the church.

Project dates Start: 22-01-2007 End: 03-04-2007

Previous/future work Yes / No

Any associated project reference codes BQW 06 - Sitecode

Type of project Recording project

Site status Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area

Current Land use Other 4 - Churchyard

Monument type INHUMATION CEMETERY Medieval

Monument type INHUMATION CEMETERY Post Medieval

Investigation type 'Watching Brief'

Prompt Faculty jurisdiction

#### Project location

Country England  
Site location GREATER LONDON TOWER HAMLETS BOW St Mary Stratford  
Bow Church  
Postcode E3 2XX  
Study area 800.00 Square metres  
Site coordinates TQ 3768 8295 51.5281544316 -0.01499796958230 51 31 41 N 000  
00 53 W Point

#### Project creators

Name of Organisation Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd

Project brief originator Diocesan Archaeologist

Project design originator Peter Moore

Project director/manager Peter Moore

Project supervisor Ashley Pooley

Type of sponsor/funding body Parish Council

Name of sponsor/funding body Parochial Church Council of St Mary and Holy Trinity, Bow

#### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital Archive recipient LAARC

Digital Contents	'Stratigraphic','Survey'
Digital Media available	'Text'
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Contents	'Stratigraphic'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Drawing','Plan','Report','Section','Unpublished Text'
Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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