



OAKFORD
ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological Evaluation at St Mary's, Ottery St Mary, Devon



on behalf of
Caroe & Partners

Report No. 12-03

Project No. 1049

August 2012



OAKFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological Groundworks and Historic Buildings

44 Hazel Road,
Wonford
Exeter,
Devon
EX2 6HN
tel: 07834 591406
e-mail: info@oakfordarch.co.uk
web: www.oakfordarch.co.uk

AUTHOR

MFR Steinmetzer

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

John Allan and Roger Taylor

Report No 12-03

Revision: 01
Date: August 2012

Contents

Summary	
1 Introduction	1
1.1 The site	1
1.2 Archaeological background	1
2. Aims	2
3. Methodology	2
4. Results	2
4.1 Trench 1	2
5. The Finds	3
6. Discussion	5
7. Conclusions	5
8. Project Archive	5

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Appendix 1: Context descriptions by trench

List of illustrations

Fig. 1 Location of site.

Fig. 2 Trench location.

Fig. 3 Plan and sections Trench 1.

List of plates

Plate 1 General view of blocked openings in west wall of boiler room, 1m scale. Looking Northwest.

Plate 2 General view of Tr 1 showing waterproofed roof of second chamber. 2m scale. Looking south.

Plate 3 Section through Tr 1 showing depth of deposits above second chamber. 2m scale. Looking southeast.

Plate 4 Section through Tr 1 showing depth of deposits above second chamber. 2m scale. Looking southeast.

Plate 5 Close-up of waterproofing on roof and side of church elevation. 1m scale. Looking south.

Plate 6 Close-up of church elevation showing waterproofing. 1m scale. Looking south.

Plate 7 Close-up showing foundation cut for second chamber (foreground) and probable medieval masonry in section. 1m scale. Looking north.

Plate 8 Section through Tr 1 showing possible medieval masonry (103/104), surviving subsoil (101) and natural subsoil. 1m scale. Looking east.

Plate 9 Medieval floor tiles: Normandy tile 1480-1540 (top), late 13th-14th century (right), and plain late medieval tile (left). 10cm scale.

Plate 10 Close-up of Normandy tile showing remains of dark green glazing and heavily worn surface. 10cm scale.

Plate 11 Close-up of late 15th-16th century South Somerset ridge tile. 10cm scale

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Oakford Archaeology at St Mary's Church, Ottery St Mary, Devon (SY 0985 9557), during July 2012. The work comprised the hand-excavation of a single trench totalling 5m in length and 0.8m wide. This was excavated in order to establish the archaeological potential of the area between the north transept tower and the choir vestry.

The work exposed the tarred ceiling of a second underground chamber associated with the existing boiler room. The remains of a possible medieval wall foundation on the north side of the church were uncovered at the northern end of the trench. The level of truncation was such that no earlier features or deposits were found within the proposed development area.

Fragments of medieval earthenware floor tiles, dating to 13th-15th century, were recovered from the disturbed soil. This included a type from the Normandy region of France not previously identified at St Mary's Church.

1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oakford Archaeology (OA) in July 2012 to assess the potential archaeological impact of a proposed toilet block development at St Mary's Church, Ottery St Mary, Devon (SY 0985 9557). The report has been prepared at the request of Caroe & Partners, and the Ottery St Mary Parochial Church Council (PCC).

1.1 The site

The site lies along the north side of St Mary's Church, close to the north transept tower and west of the choir vestry, at a height of approximately 63m AOD. The underlying solid geology consists of upper sandstone laid down in the Triassic period, and weathering to sand near the surface (BGS Sheet 326).

1.2 Archaeological and historical background

In 963 King Edgar granted two *cassati* (i.e. about 2 hides, or 240 acres) of land called *Othery* to his *minister* Wulfhelm (Hooke 1994). This seems to have comprised mainly the area of the town and lands to the east. In 1061 Edward the Confessor granted land at Ottery to the Cathedral Church of St Mary at Rouen in northern France. On balance it seems likely that there was a pre-Conquest church at Ottery, but its status is uncertain. Ottery St Mary was also the centre of a Saxon administrative hundred, and these often coincided with ecclesiastical centres. The manor in 1068 was said to consist of 25 hides (Thorn & Thorn 1985). The total population in 1086 would have been about 500 people (Darby & Finn 1967). There is no mention of a church in the Domesday Book, but there are 12th-century references to vicars at Ottery St Mary. It can be assumed that a church existed there in the 12th/13th centuries, probably located on or near any earlier ecclesiastical site, and most likely within the area of the present parish church.

The first direct documentary reference to the Church of St Mary in Ottery St Mary is in 1259 when a dedication was undertaken by Bishop Bronescombe, which may well have been for a new chapel or altar (Hingeston-Randolph 1889). In 1334/5 Bishop Grandisson of Exeter purchased the manor and hundred from the Church of Rouen and subsequently founded a college of secular priests centred on the existing church (Dalton 1917). The licence for the new foundation was granted in 1335, and in 1337 the new officers for the college were appointed.

There were 40 members in all of the new collegiate church with the four principal officers being the warden, minister, precentor and sacristan. Four prebendial canons were also attached to the church; there were eight choral vicars, eight secondary clerks and eight choirboys. Of the remaining staff, seven were clergy with special responsibility, such as the priest for parishioners, and the final one was the master of grammar. The college was endowed with the manor and hundred, and the tithes of the whole parish (Youings 1955).

The most notable addition to Grandisson's church was the north aisle, called the Dorset Aisle after the benefactor Cicely, Marchioness of Dorset, who was a direct descendant of Grandisson. There are several detailed accounts of the architecture of the church including Cherry & Pevsner (1989), Coleridge (1843) and Cornish (1869).

The college was dissolved in 1545 and Henry VIII granted the Church, and part of the adjacent buildings of the collegiate church, to four inhabitants of Ottery St Mary (Youings 1955).

2. AIMS

The principal aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, character, extent, depth and date of archaeological features and deposits within the footprints of the proposed development. The results of the evaluation (this document), in conjunction with the desk-based assessment, will inform the planning process and may be used to formulate a programme of further archaeological work either prior to and/or during groundworks.

3. METHODOLOGY

The work comprised the hand excavation of a single 5m long, and 0.8m wide trench. It was positioned in an area thought to be unaffected by the underground boiler room. Concrete and underlying deposits were removed to expose the top of archaeological deposits which were then cleaned by hand, investigated and recorded. The position of the trench as excavated is shown on Fig. 2.

The standard OA recording system was employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* context record sheets and individual trench recording forms, plans and sections for each trench were drawn at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a detailed digital photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings and context sheets on *pro forma* sheets.

4. RESULTS

Relevant detailed plans and sections are included as Fig 3 and context descriptions for the trench are set out in Appendix 1.

4.1 Trench 1 (Detailed plan and section Fig. 3. Plates 2-8)

The trench measured 5m x 0.8m, was orientated approximately N-S, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.35m. It was sited to investigate the undisturbed area to the west of the boiler room. The remains of a limestone rubble wall foundation (103 and 104) and a second underground chamber (107) were identified. These cut through natural subsoil at a depth of 1.16m below current ground level. Context descriptions for this trench are set out in Table 1, Appendix 1.

Structure 103/104 was an E-W aligned linear feature exposed at a depth of 550mm. It was constructed of small limestone rubble bonded with light yellow/white lime mortar. It is interpreted as the heavily robbed rubble wall foundation of a building located on the north side of the church. The full width of the wall was not recovered as it lay beyond the excavated area.

Structure 106 represents the ceiling of a second underground chamber exposed at a depth of 1350mm and measuring at least 4.5m wide. It was constructed of small limestone rubble bonded with white lime mortar and coated in tar.

5. THE FINDS

A very modest collection of archaeological material was recovered, with the majority being in a very good state of preservation. Most of the artefacts in the assemblage date from the medieval and post-medieval period. The finds are briefly described below.

5.1 Medieval tiles

Until recently the only evidence for the medieval pavements of the church has been the row of tiles reset in the retroquire against the back of the reredos, and the seven undated fragments recovered by Exeter Archaeology during works in the graveyard in 2005. The latter were petrologically examined, suggesting a hitherto unknown medieval tile production centre located somewhere in the Otter valley. Four fragments were recovered from the disturbed soil (108) during the course of the evaluation. Descriptions of each tile represented are given in Dr Taylor's report below.

PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF FLOOR-TILES *by Roger Taylor*

OA 1049 (108)

1. Plain tile, white fired, emerald green glaze survives on edge, but is worn away from surface. Thickness 24 mm. Mineral content c 50% larger grains.

Quartz – Translucent colourless angular grains, 0.15-0.6 mm.

Matrix – Finely sandy clay with sparse red ferruginous spots.

Comment: Tile fabricated from kaolinitic clay with a low iron content. The quartz is probably an original component of the clay rather than an added component. This is not a locally produced tile but similar white fired green glazed tiles were imported from Normandy.

2. Plain tile with corner, oxidised fragment, 21 mm thick. Hard fired. Mineral content c 10%

Quartz – Sparse matt surfaced sub-rounded to rounded opaque white and orange tinted, 0.2-0.6mm

Rock fragments – Sandstone, Sparse bleached buff angular fragments, 0.6-2 mm, rarely 7mm long.

Matrix – Silty clay

Comment: This tile is likely to have been locally made with clay possibly derived from the Sidmouth Mudstone and the mineral components derived from the Otter Sandstone. Both formations crop out in the vicinity of the town.

3. Plain tile with a conical scooped key in base, oxidised base and sides with light grey reduced core and upper surface (fired base up), 15 mm thick. Remnants of very pale green devitrified glaze on the upper surface. Mineral content. c 80%

Quartz – Transparent to translucent colourless and some red-brown stained, angular to sub-angular grains, 0.05-0.15 mm.

Mica – Muscovite, sparse cleavage flakes

Comment: The mineral content is of uniform size and distribution indicating a deliberately tempered tile. This highly sand tempered fabric is akin to some medieval tiles with sandy fabrics from Exeter, although not from the same source. A possible source for the sand is the Otter Sandstone.

General comment

A suite of tiles of different style and manufacture. They all differ from the tiles recorded from Ottery St Mary churchyard (Passmore, A. 2006. *Archaeological recording in the graveyard of the Parish Church of Ottery St Mary. Proceedings of Devon Archaeological Society*. Vol. 64, pp. 343-347). It is likely that the two red fired tiles were made locally using components from the Triassic rocks of the area.

5.2 Post-medieval pottery

The disturbed soil (108) produced 8 sherds of pottery, weighing 404g, which are post-medieval in character. They consist of 7 sherds of South Somerset/Honiton coarsewares, including 1 large bowl and 1 scraffito decorated slipware dish, and a single sherd of Staffordshire white earthenware. They generally fall between the 16th and 19th century.

5.3 Post-medieval tile

Only three small fragments of post-medieval floor tile were recovered from the disturbed soil (108). One fragment comes from South Somerset and dates to the late 16th-17th century, while two fragments were simple peg tiles dating to the 19th century.

5.4 Post-medieval clay pipe

Four clay pipe stems, dating to the late 17th-early 18th century were recovered, along with a simple Exeter type bowl.

5.5 Architectural fragments

Four medieval architectural fragments were recovered from Trench 1. These were made of Beer stone, a chalk from Beer in east Devon, and Salcombe stone, a limestone from east Devon. The three fragments of Beer stone consisted of simple slabs, possibly representing floor slabs, while the Salcombe block was a simple window jamb with a chamfered corner and a window bar recess.

A single fragment of an early 19th century gravestone was recovered. This consisted of grey lias, with the name 'JOHN'.

5.6 Fe objects

Seven iron nails, measuring approximately 4-10cm in length, were recovered from disturbed soil 108.

5.6 Disarticulated human bone

87 disarticulated bone fragments were recovered from the excavation of the trench. These are mostly cranium and rib fragments. The large majority of these bones are from adult individuals, with a small number from juvenile individuals. The minimum number of individuals represented by the disarticulated bone is eight.

6. DISCUSSION

The evaluation has established that the site lies within an area of high disturbance to the north of the church. The results indicate that the 20th century boiler room extends into the area to the east of the north transept tower. Deliberate infilling (108) is likely to be derived from the excavation of post-medieval burials.

At the northern end, trench 1 uncovered remains of a limestone rubble wall foundation (103/104). There was no direct dating evidence, so the wall is not certainly medieval, but this seems probable. The wall foundation survives to within 550mm of current ground level, sealed beneath 20th century infilling (108). The wall foundation truncated what appears to be a former subsoil (101) at a depth of 850mm.

Modern disturbance associated with the boiler room has clearly impacted upon archaeological survival as no medieval or later features, deposits and/or surfaces have survived within the proposed development area.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The trench evaluation constitutes a thorough examination of the site with the trench positioned to provide a comprehensive sample of the proposed development area. The results are archaeologically disappointing as evidence for archaeological activity within the proposed development area was negligible. The removal of modern material within Trench 1 has exposed the ceiling of a second underground chamber at a depth of approximately 1350mm. Structural elements relating to an earlier building to the north of the church have been confirmed in section at the northern end of Trench 1.

The construction of the toilet block will entail excavation to an indicated depth of 1700mm. This may expose further elements of medieval wall foundation along the northern edge of the development but will not significantly impact upon it. Whilst part of the site was not investigated, this is likely to be the most highly disturbed area as it lies within the footprint of the existing underground boiler room and will therefore have reduced potential. Further investigation here may well be considered appropriate; to confirm the levels of disturbance and record the exposed medieval church fabric, but this could perhaps be carried out as conditioned mitigation.

If development were to proceed there may be potential for further exposures of the medieval wall foundation and associated deposits within service trenches required to serve the new building.

The identification of a new floor-tile type shows that even small-scale modern observations in areas of high disturbance are useful in furthering knowledge about the archaeological resource.

8. PROJECT ARCHIVE

The site records have been compiled into a fully integrated site archive currently being held by Oakford Archaeology (project no. 1049) pending deposition at Royal Albert Memorial Museum (deposition currently suspended until 2013). Details of the investigations, including

a copy of this report, have been submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (oakforda1-131883).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This evaluation was commissioned and funded by the PCC and administered on behalf of the client by Michael Vaughan (Caroe & Partners) and David Roberts (PCC). The project was managed for Oakford Archaeology by Marc Steinmetzer. The fieldwork was carried out by Marc Steinmetzer and Ben Pears, the illustrations for the report were prepared by Marc Steinmetzer, and the finds analysis was carried out by John Allan and Roger Taylor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published sources

- Cherry, B. & Pevsner, N. 1989 *The Buildings of England: Devon* (2nd ed.).
- Coleridge, F.G. 1843 'An Account of the Church of Ottery St Mary', *Trans. Exeter Diocesan Architect Soc.* Vol. 1.
- Cornish, S.W. 1869 (revised 1938 by F.F. Cornish) *Short Notes on the Church and Parish of Ottery St Mary, Devon.*
- Dalton, J.N. 1917 *The Collegiate Church of Ottery St Mary.*
- Darby, H.C. & Finn, R.W. 1979 *The Domesday Geography of South-West England.*
- Hingeston-Randolph, F.C. 1897 *The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (1327-69): Part II 1331-60.*
- Hooke, D. 1994 *Pre-Conquest Charter Bounds of Devon and Cornwall.*
- Thorn, C. & Thorn, F. 1985 *Domesday Book: Devon.*
- Youings, J. 1955 *Devon Monastic Lands: Calendar of Particulars for Grants 1536-1558*, Devon Cornwall Rec. Soc. New Ser. Vol. 1.
- Passmore, A 2006 'Archaeological recording in the graveyard of the parish church of Ottery St Mary, 2005', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* 64, 343-347.

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Table 1: Trench 1

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
100	1.15+	Light to mid yellow sand	Natural Subsoil
101	0.85-1.15m	Light to mid brown yellow sand	Remnant subsoil
102	0.55+	E-W aligned linear	Foundation trench
103	0.85+	E-W aligned wall	Wall foundation
104	0.55-0.85m	E-W aligned wall	Wall foundation
105	-	E-W aligned wall	North wall church
106	0.40+	E-W aligned linear	Foundation trench
107	1.35+	Ceiling	Second chamber ceiling
108	0.25-1.35m	Mid yellow-brown clayey sand	Fill of foundation trench [106]
109	0.25-0.80m	NW-SE aligned linear	Modern service trench
110	0.25-0.80m	Mid to dark brown-yellow clayey sand	Fill of service trench [109]
111	0.18-0.25m	Brick surface	Modern brick surface
112	0.15-0.25m	sand sub-base	sand sub-base
113	0-0.15m	concrete	concrete

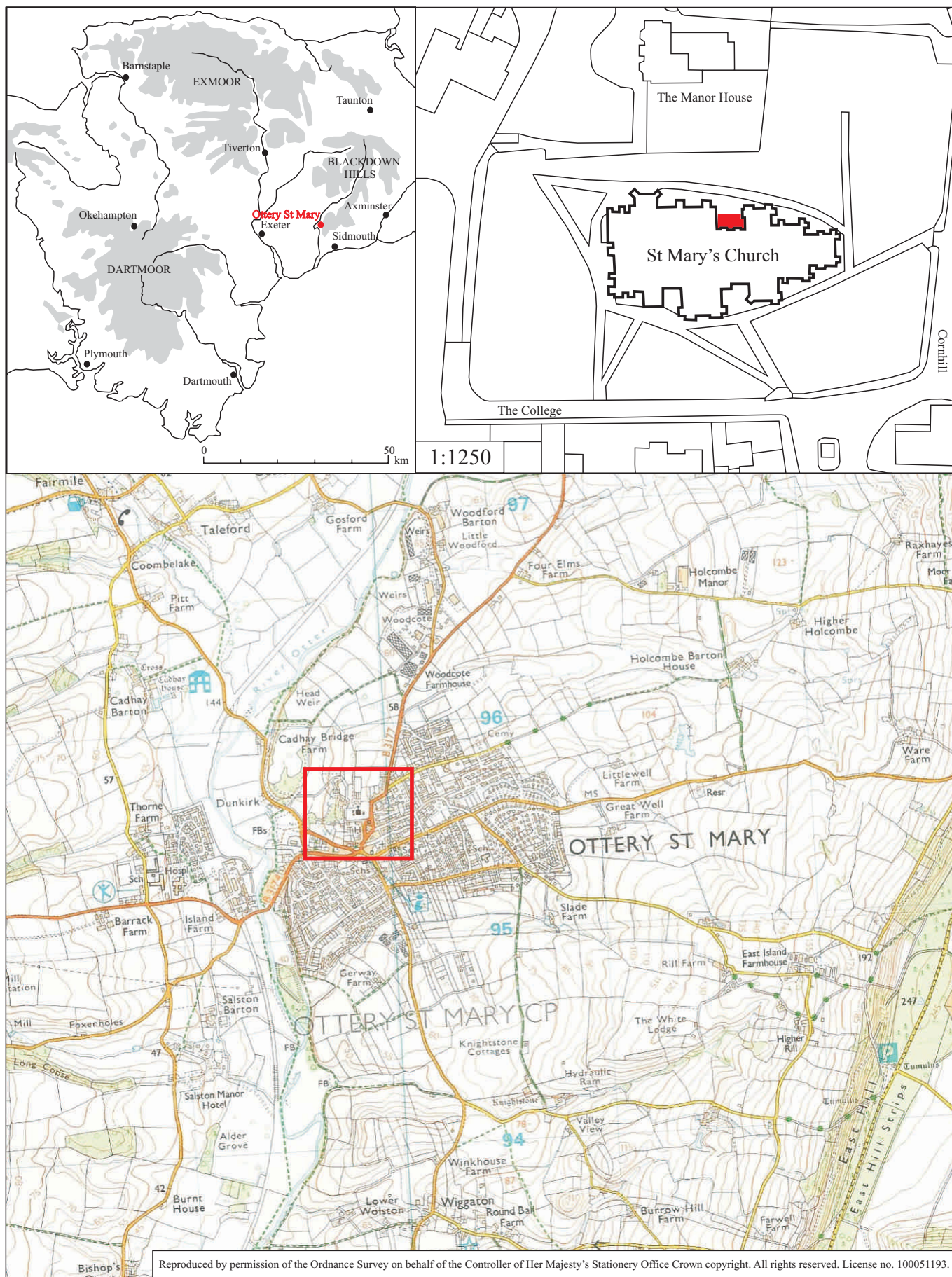


Fig. 1 Location of site

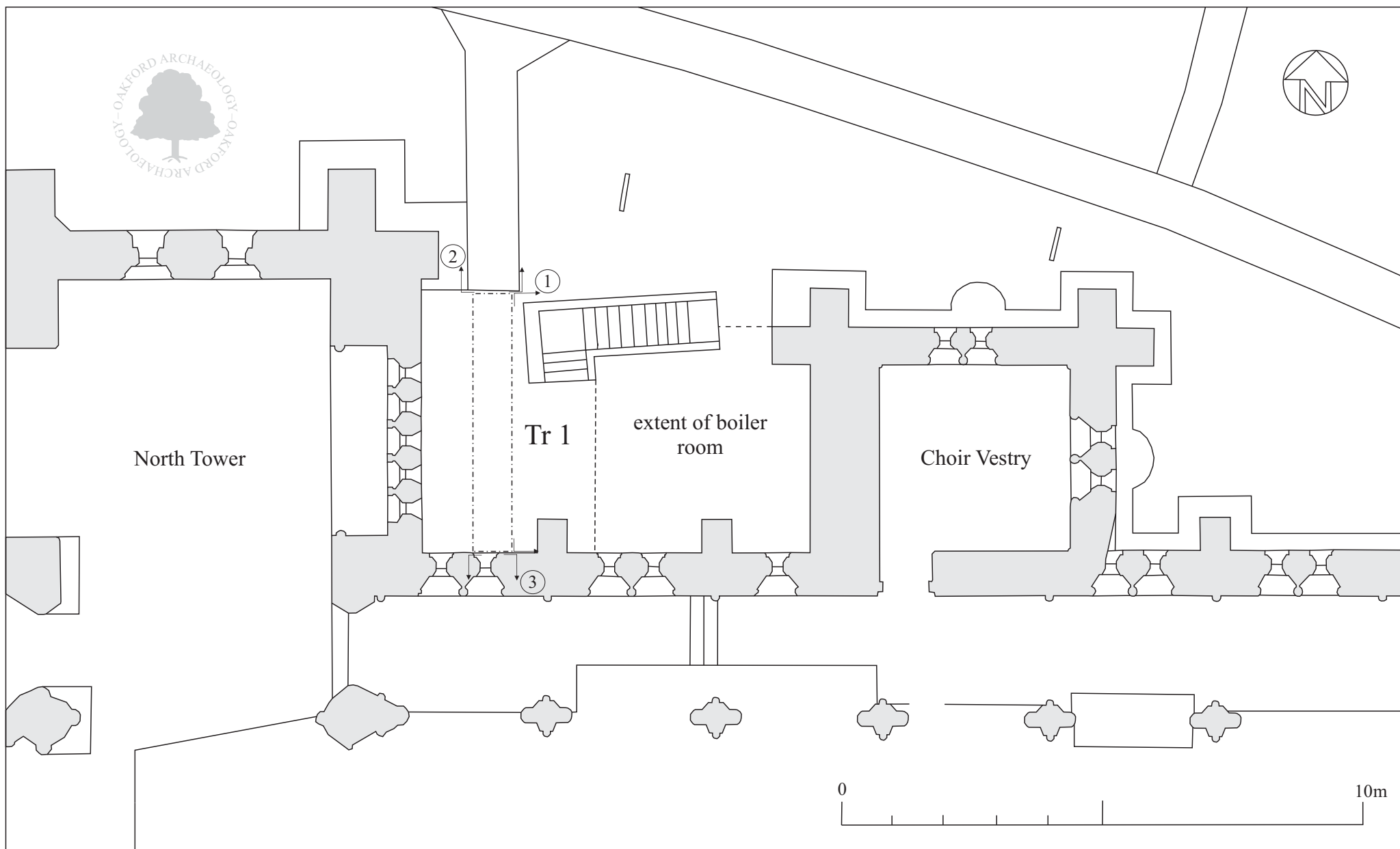


Fig. 2 Trench location

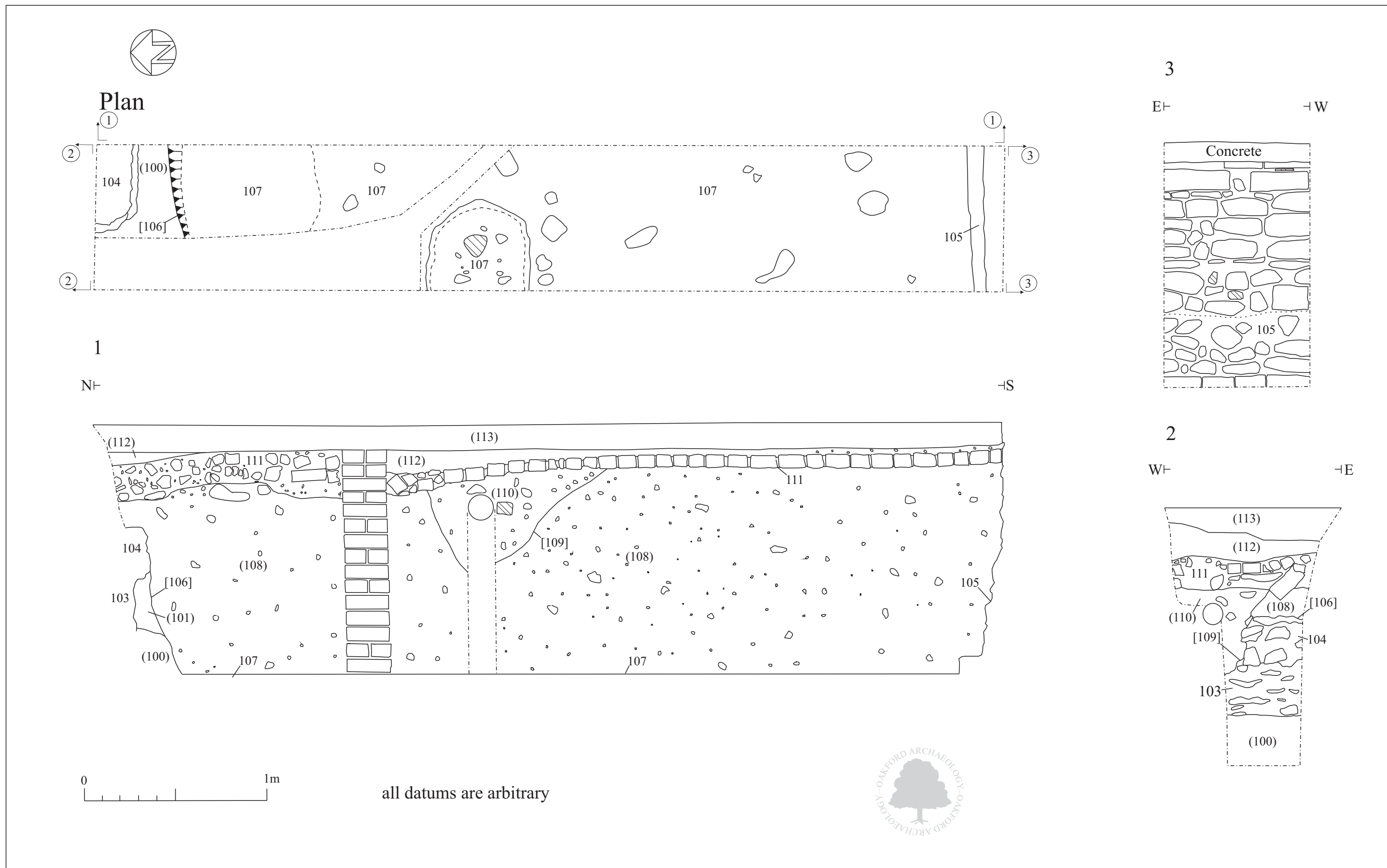


Fig. 3 Plan and sections Trench 1.



Pl. 1 General view of blocked openings in west wall of boiler room, 1m scale. Looking Northwest.



Pl. 2 General view of Tr 1 showing waterproofed roof of second chamber, 2m scale. Looking south.



Pl. 3 Section through Tr 1 showing depth of deposits above second chamber. 2m scale. Looking southeast.



Pl. 4 Section through Tr 1 showing depth of deposits above second chamber. 2m scale. Looking southwest.



Pl. 5 Close-up of waterproofing on roof and side of church elevation. 1m scale. Looking south.



Pl. 6 Close-up of church elevation showing waterproofing. 1m scale. Looking south.



Pl. 7 Close-up showing foundation cut for second chamber (foreground) and probable medieval masonry in section. 1m scale. Looking north.



Pl. 8 Section through Tr 1 showing possible medieval masonry (103/104), surviving subsoil (101) and natural subsoil. 1m scale. Looking east.



Pl. 9 Medieval floor tiles: Normandy tile 1480-1540 (top), late 13th-14th century (right), and plain late medieval tile (left). 10cm scale.



Pl. 10 Close-up of Normandy tile showing remains of dark green glazing and heavily worn surface. 10cm scale.



Pl. 11 Close-up of late 15th-16th century South Somerset ridge tile. 10cm scale.