

**Archaeological Watching Brief at
St Barnabas' Church
Erdington
Birmingham
NGR SP 1101 9171**

Planning Application No: 2009/05470/PA

Site Code: SBE 11/12

Report No. 006

April 2013

Produced for: St Barnabas' Church, Erdington Parochial Church Council

Produced by: Zoë Sutherland



Cramp Sutherland Archaeological Services

34 Belgrave Crescent, Woodsmoor, Stockport, SK2 7BA

Tel: 07747 615 328

Email: csarc@csarc.co.uk

Contents

Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Site location and character	2
3.0 Archaeological and historical background	2
4.0 Methodology	3
5.0 Results of the watching brief	5
6.0 Conclusions	15
7.0 Acknowledgements	18
8.0 References	18
FIG. 1: Site location	20
FIG. 2: Plan of the church with the new extension area and associated service trenches marked in red	21
FIG. 3: Extract from the 1889 OS map	22
FIG. 4: Extract from the 1915 OS map	22
FIG. 5: Plan showing trenches excavated in the extension area and also Trenches 10 and 11	23
FIG. 6: Plan of Trench 9	24
PLATE 1: Excavation around the pilings, looking north-east	25
PLATE 2: Vaults (100) and (200) looking north-west	26
PLATE 3: The interior of vault (100)	27
PLATE 4: The wall slots and metal bars supporting coffin 3	27
PLATE 5: The inserted slots on the north-west side of vault (100)	28

PLATE 6: Vault (300) looking south-west	28
PLATE 7: Broken grave stones within vault (300)	29
PLATE 8: Grave stone (400) looking north-east	29
PLATE 9: Vault (600) looking north-east	30
PLATE 10: Probable brick-lined grave (700) looking south-west	30
PLATE 11: Probable vault (900) alongside grave cut [1001] with upper fill of compact mortar (1000), looking north-east	31
PLATE 12: Grave plot 11 looking north-east	32
PLATE 13: Grave plot 12 looking north-east	32
PLATE 14: Grave plot 13 looking north-east	33
PLATE 15: Grave plot 14, visible in the south-east facing section of Trench 9	33
PLATE 16: Vault (1500) looking north	34
PLATE 17: Grave plot 17 looking north-east	34

Summary

Cramp Sutherland Archaeological Services (CSARC) undertook an archaeological watching brief at St Barnabas' church, Erdington, Birmingham (NGR SP 1101 9171) between the 20th June 2011 and the 2nd May 2012. The project monitored ground-works carried out in the course of the construction of a new extension on the north-west side of the church. During excavation, evidence for a total of 17 grave plots was uncovered, including six brick burial vaults of probable 19th-century date. The encountered remains were either left in-situ below the foundations of the new building, or were avoided by adjusting the course of service trenches.

The scope of the watching brief, along with the active avoidance strategy, meant that much of the evidence was limited. Some understanding of the structure of the vaults was, however, gained. Damage to the top of one of the vaults allowed a view of the coffined burials within. A phase of deliberate grave stone clearance had also evidently taken place on the north-west side of the church at least. A number of broken grave stones were found in this area, many within a damaged vault. The predominance of mid to late 20th-century grave stones throughout the graveyard may indicate an early 20th century date for this phase of clearance.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission for the refurbishment of St Barnabas' Church, Erdington, (application no. 2009/05470/PA), including an extension on the north-west side, was granted with the condition that a scheme of archaeological work take place during development; mitigating the discovery of unmarked graves and any other archaeological material. Birmingham City Council's Planning Archaeologist (PA) decided that this work should take the form of an archaeological watching brief. CSARC was subsequently appointed to undertake the project by Brownhill Hayward Brown on behalf of the developer, The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St Barnabas' church, Erdington.

2.0 Site location and character

2.1 Erdington is a residential suburb of Birmingham, some 8km north-east of the city centre (Fig. 1). St Barnabas' Church enjoys a central location in Erdington, on the south-east side of High Street. The church stands at the north-west end of a rectangular plot encompassing some 1.76 hectares, much of which is occupied by an extensive burial ground (Fig. 2). The plot is bounded by Church Road to the south-west, Moor End Lane to the south-east, and by both the back gardens of residential properties on Dunvegan Road and commercial properties off High Street to the north-east. The land around the church sits at c.124m AOD with a gentle slope eastwards down to c.112m AOD on Moor End Lane.

2.2 The drift geology of the development area is characterised by quaternary fluvio-glacial sand and gravel overlying a solid geology (bedrock) of Triassic Mercia mudstone laid down about 251 to 199 million years BP.

3.0 Archaeological and historical background

3.1 Settlement in Erdington dates back to at least the Anglo-Saxon period, probably focused upon a homestead on the north bank of the river at Bromford, which by the 12th century had become Erdington Hall (National Monument Record no. 332111), the *caput* of a manorial *desmense* (Jones 1984b, 6-7). Scattered farmsteads and small-holdings belonging to the manor had likely begun to coalesce by the 14th century, eventually forming a township in the area of High Street (Jones 1984a, 17); advantageous for its location on the main route from Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield and Lichfield.

3.3 By the 18th century Erdington was a burgeoning township and with the turnpiking of the main road in 1807, became one of the stopping points for stage coaches running between London and Chester. The 19th-century industrial expansion of Birmingham saw associated suburban development

in Erdington, facilitated by the introduction of the railway line in 1862, connecting the town with the nearby metropolis (Jones 1984b, 20).

3.4 St Barnabas' Church, a Grade II Listed building, was built in 1822-23 to the plans of self-taught architect Thomas Rickman (1776-1841). Rickman was one of the leading exponents of late Georgian medieval revivalist architecture, and with his partner Henry Hutchinson, also designed the new court of St John's College, Cambridge (Stringer 1999, 7). The original church was in plain Gothic style, known as 'Church Commissioners Gothic' and comprised an aisleless nave divided into four bays with a thin tower at the west end supported by angle buttresses. A chancel and transepts of the Decorated style, designed by Birmingham architect Julius Alfred Chatwin (1830-1907), were added in 1883 (Heritage List). A vicarage was built on Church Road in 1860 (Jones 1984b, 20) and in 1891 the cemetery was extended south (BA – DR075A/2) (Fig. 4). On 4th October 2007 the church was badly damaged by a deliberately set fire.

3.5 A graveyard survey (Boddy 2009) and a Desk-Based Assessment (Cramp 2009) were produced in order to accompany the planning application for the church refurbishment. The former survey identified a number of grave markers to be relocated, including a chest-tomb belonging to James Cartwright (d.1843), a flat tomb to John Kestin Oran (d. 1845) and a Common Wealth Ware Graves Commission headstone to Sgt. J.W. Harris, who was killed in 1943. The Desk-Based Assessment identified the potential for development works to uncover unmarked burials as well as evidence of earlier activity.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 A watching brief is defined by the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* as a programme of observation and investigation conducted during any work carried out for non archaeological reasons. It is intended to define, so far as is reasonably

possible, the nature, depth and preservation of any archaeological material encountered (IfA, revised 2008).

4.2 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the Planning Archaeologist's specification (Hodder 2010) and with the Written Scheme of Investigation that was prepared by Stoke-on-Trent Archaeology and issued by CSARC (Cramp 2011). The project complied with Policy 8.36 of Birmingham City Council's *Unitary Development Plan* and its *Archaeology Strategy (Supplementary Planning Guidance)* as well as national guidelines established in *PPG16 (Archaeology and Planning, 1990)*, since replaced first by *Planning Policy Statement 5 (Planning and the Historic Environment, 2010)* and now by the *National Planning Policy Framework: Section 12 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (2012)*. It also adhered to current best archaeological practice and the relevant national codes of conduct, standards and guidance advocated in the *By-laws of the Institute for Archaeologists* (IfA, revised 2010).

4.3 The specific aims and objectives of the project were to:

- Identify and record any unmarked graves
- Identify and record any evidence of activity and settlement prior to the construction of the church.

4.4 The watching brief was carried out over several days between the 20th June 2011 and the 2nd May 2012. Ground-work excavations were carried out both with a 180° backhoe excavator and by hand. All ground-works were monitored and exposed sub-soils inspected for archaeological features. Written records in the form of site notes, annotated sketches and *pro-forma* context sheets were made, augmented by high resolution colour digital and 35mm monochrome print photography to record specific stages of the field work.

- 4.5** Where evidence of *in-situ* human remains was encountered these were left in place with no excavation carried out beyond any cleaning necessary to better define the exposed deposits. In all circumstances it was possible to alter the course or level of trenches to avoid the disturbance of the encountered remains. Small amounts of disarticulated human bone were encountered which were reburied where found below formation depth for the new extension or the associated service trenches.
- 4.6** In this report the context numbers for individual archaeological layers, fills, or structures are represented in parentheses, e.g. (001). Those represented in square brackets, e.g. [001], pertain specifically to cut features (ditches, graves etc.). A new series of context numbers has also been issued for each burial plot encountered, i.e. (100)+ for plot 1, (200)+ for plot 2 etc.
- 4.7** An ordered archive comprising data collected during the course of the project is stored by CSARC, pending transfer to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham (site code: **SBE 11/12**).
- 5.0 Results of the watching brief**
- 5.1** The ground-works were carried out in three main stages:
- 1)** Excavation around 25 previously sunk concrete pilings for the new extension (Plate 1). The area excavated around each of the piles was between 1.50m and 2.00m square and approximately 1.00m deep.
 - 2)** Excavation of the foundations (trenches 1-8) for the new extension, linking the piling trenches (Fig. 5). The foundation trenches were between 0.45m and 0.70m wide and 0.50m to 0.80m deep.
 - 3)** Excavation of services including the main service trench (9) as well as two drainage trenches/sumps (10 & 11). See section 5.3 below.
- 5.2 Excavation for the new extension** (Fig. 5)
- 5.2.1** The basic soil profile in the area of the new extension consisted of:

(001) Layer of brick rubble and stone chippings, 0.55m to 0.75m thick.
laid down as a working surface during construction.

(002) Reddish-brown, firm, sandy-clay with moderate inclusions of
small rounded pebbles. 0.30m to 0.45m thick.

5.2.2 Immediately next to the church, however, it consisted of:

(003) Concrete hard-standing, 0.08m thick.

(004) Mid-brown silty-clay with occasional inclusions of small rounded
pebbles, 0.16m to 0.36m thick.

(005) Greenish-yellow sand with moderate inclusions of sand-stone
fragments, 0.20m to 0.45m thick.

(002) Reddish-brown sandy-clay, 0.32m thick.

5.2.3 During excavation for the new extension several grave plots (most
previously unidentified) were encountered, some evident as vaults and
some as *in-situ* grave markers. A number of broken headstones were also
seen towards the south side of the area.

Grave Plot 1

5.2.4 This was a vault (100), constructed with red un-frogged bricks and
located immediately to the south-east side of Pile No. 22 (Plate 2). This
location corresponds with the chest-tomb to James Cartwright (d. 1843),
grave A299, identified during the graveyard survey. The north-east end of
the vault only was exposed, below 0.45m of (001). This revealed, however,
that the structure was at least 1.55m wide (NW-SE) and consisted of 0.23m
thick walls with a vaulted top. The side walls, seen in section, continued
0.34m above the level of the vaulted roof to support a 0.15m thick stone
slab, probably part of the chest-tomb super-structure. The vault was
presumably cut into the surrounding sandy-clay (002)

5.2.5 Damage to the vaulted top allowed a visual inspection of the structure's
interior, which was approximately 2.25m deep. Vault (100) contained five

coffined burials (C1-C5); arranged with two coffins on the south-east side (C1 below and C3 above) and three on the north-west side (from bottom to top: C2, C4 and C5). The middle pair of coffins (C3 and C4) were resting on three metal bars which spanned the vault and were supported at each end in slots in the side walls (Plate 4). Similar, unutilised, pairs of slots were seen in the side walls five brick courses higher up. The uppermost coffin (C5), however, rested on metal bars supported in additional slots seen on the north-west side of the vault only. These were located between the two levels of paired slots and appeared to be later insertions (Plate 5). The south-east end of the bars carrying C5 were supported on stacks of bricks placed on the lower bars.

5.2.6 Some information on the coffin types could be gathered, albeit limited by their deterioration and collapse as well as the lack of accessibility. As far as could be ascertained all were wooden coffins, and those belonging to the upper burials (C3 and C5) were of the single-break type (Plate 3). The C3 coffin at least was double-skinned but collapse of the C5 coffin meant that its construction was hard to discern. Both the C3 and C5 coffins had trapezoidal copper-alloy *depositum* plates placed on the lids with *fleur-de-llys* embellishment at the corners of the former and with *patée* type crosses at the corners of the latter. Small lid embellishments, possibly lid-screws or escutcheons, were also visible on both the upper coffins as were the remains of wreaths, surviving as metal rings and evergreen foliage. Gilt coffin handles of a geometric type design were evident on the C3 coffin.

Grave Plot 2

5.2.7 This was a c.1.50m wide brick vault (**200**) adjoining the south-east side of vault (**100**) (Plate 2). The two structures were not bonded together, but the small gap between them had been mortared. Vault (**200**) was of a similar construction to its neighbour, however, a reddish mortar layer (**201**) sat above the vaulted top. Much of the top had been damaged resulting in a void filled with a dark brown clay-silt (**202**) containing the

remnants of a plastic flower arrangement, perhaps an indication of relatively recent disturbance.

- 5.2.8** Prior to further construction works, and with the approval of the Planning Archaeologist, the revealed sections of vaults **(100)** and **(200)** were covered with a layer of earth and then capped with shuttered concrete.

Grave Plot 3

- 5.2.9** Brick vault **(300)** was encountered between Piles No. 11 and 12, below 0.62m of brick rubble **(001)** (Plate 6). Again, it was most likely cut into the surrounding sandy clay **(002)**, although no cut for its construction was evident. Further excavation during the excavation of Trench 7 revealed the south-west end of the structure. The vault, as revealed, was 1.06m long (NE- SW), 1.30m wide and 0.40m high. It consisted of parallel brick walls, each 0.23m wide but then stepped out by 0.18m below the uppermost two courses. An arched brick top to the vault was evident below 0.10m of red-brown silty clay **(301)**. The inner part of the side walls appeared to be built over the arched vault top, extending at least 0.11m above it. The south-west wall of the vault had an inner and outer skin, each 0.23m wide, with a 0.16m thick stone slab resting on top of the outer skin. It is possible that the stone slab was associated with an entrance to the vault.

- 5.2.10** Damage to the vault top towards the north-east end of the revealed portion, again, allowed a visual inspection of its interior. No coffins, however, were visible within the vault. Instead, a number of broken grave markers **(301)** were evident (Plate 7), presumably the result of the deliberate clearance of this part of the graveyard and the probable cause of the damage to the vault top. A number of broken pieces of grave marker in the vicinity of vault **(300)** may also have resulted from this clearance episode. One fragment found next to Pile No. 11 bore the inscription ‘..OVING MEMORY OF / WILLIAM PAXTON / ..USBAND OF ELIZABET... / THIS LIFE JULY... / ED 54 YE..’.

5.2.11 Vault (300) was encountered at a sufficiently low level that the steel foundations beams for the new structure would span over the top of it without causing any damage.

Grave Plot 4

5.2.12 This was the *in-situ*, 0.10m high, stump of a grave marker (400), located immediately to the south-west side of Pile No. 23, below 0.25m of rubble (001) and set within sandy-clay (002). The main part of the stone (which measured approximately 0.84m x 0.95m) was lying flat to the north-east side of the stump, having fallen or been pushed over (Plate 8). The upper face of the fallen grave stone had an incised foliate decoration at the top and was inscribed with:

‘TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN LUCOCK / who died July 4 1837 / AGED 50
YEARS / Here lie a kind and inoffensive friend / ... in life and happy in
his ... / ... mless in words / constant to a friend an.. / ALS.. / HANNAH
WIFE O.. / WHO DIED SE.. / AGED 72 Y..’

The reverse side of the stone also had an inscription, which read:

‘IN LOVING.. / CHARLES S.. / WHO DIED FEBRUARY 28TH 1892 / AGED
65 YEARS / THY WILL BE DONE / ALSO ELIZABETH BIRD / WHO DIED
DECEMBER 30TH 1806 / AGED 66 YEARS / D...E ALBERT ..EERS / 1927/
...RS HIS WIFE / ..C 1931’.

Grave Plot 5

5.2.13 A second stump of a grave stone (500) was also seen to the north-east side of both Pile No. 23 and grave stone (400). This was 1.00m in width (NW-SE) and at least 0.32m in height. It was revealed below 0.40m of layer (001) and within sandy-clay (002).

Grave Plot 6

5.2.14 Vault (600), constructed with red un-frogged bricks, was located in Trench 1, between Piles No. 1 and 2 (Plate 9). It was revealed to a height of 0.35m, below 0.22m of (001) and extended across the trench and beneath the church wall. It was of similar construction to the other vaults encountered, with side walls which extended above the level of the arched top by some 0.10m. At 2.00m (NW-SE), it was, however, wider than the other vaults revealed. The vault top, which was covered with a 0.18m thick layer of mortar clay (601), had been badly damaged and the vault interior was filled with a mid-brown clay-silt (602).

5.2.15 Like (100) and (200), vault (600) was covered with a layer of earth and capped with concrete before the foundations of the new extension were laid.

Grave Plot 7

5.2.16 The south-east end of a rectangular brick structure (700) was seen towards the north-east end of Trench 8, extending into the south-east facing trench section (Plate 10). This 0.91m wide structure was revealed below 0.39m of rubble (001) and was probably cut into the surrounding sandy-clay (002), although no cut was visible. The walls were constructed with red un-frogged bricks and were one brick (0.11m) in width. The mid-brown sandy clay (701) within the walls was loosely compacted, indicative of a void. The structure may have been a vault or brick-lined grave, although the relative thinness of the walls would tend to indicate the latter.

Grave Plot 8

5.2.17 A third grave stone stump (800) was located towards the south-west end of Trench 8, between Piles No. 14 and 16. This was 0.57m wide (NW-SE) and revealed at the base of the trench, below 0.37m of rubble (001) and below 0.18m of silty-clay (002). Excavation of the trench did not reveal the full depth of the stone, which was set into the surrounding layer (002).

5.2.18 In addition to the features described above, which could be clearly associated with burial plots, the corner of a substantial squarish stone block (**007**) was uncovered to the south-east side of Pile No. 15. This was below 0.56m of rubble (**001**). The revealed part measured 0.25m x 0.30m and was 0.28m thick. The upper surface was uneven, possibly having been broken. Stone (**007**) may have formed the base of a grave marker or other monument, but this could not be confirmed.

5.2.19 A small number of disarticulated human bones were recovered during excavations for the church extension. These were all found within sandy-clay layer (**002**) and comprised: one skull, found in Trench 7 between Piles No. 15 and 19; part of a femur and part of a skull found in Trench 8 between Piles No. 16 and 22; one femur and part of a pelvis found in Trench 4 between Piles No. 20 and 21. These were re-buried *in-situ* but at a lower horizon.

5.3 Service trenches

5.3.1 The main service trench (9) followed a route from the lych gate on Church Street north-eastwards through the graveyard to the south-west end of the church (Fig. 6). Trench 9 was 0.75m to 0.85m wide and 0.70m and 1.00m deep. The stratigraphy encountered within this trench was of a uniform nature consisting of:

(**008**) Dark-brown silty topsoil, 0.18m to 0.29m thick.

(**009**) Reddish-brown silty clay containing occasional fragments of brick and small rounded pebbles, 0.50m to 0.70m thick.

5.3.2 Given that Trench 9 was intended take electricity cables, some flexibility of route was possible, allowing for the avoidance of burials where evidence for these was observed. This avoidance strategy meant that the evidence for graves was somewhat more ephemeral than seen in the extension area and is therefore presented in table form:

CONTEXT NO.	DESCRIPTION	MEASUREMENTS
Grave Plot 9 (Plate 11)		
900	L-shaped brick structure, probably a vault. 0.23m wide walls constructed with red unfrogged bricks. Located at SW end of trench below (008). Construction of this structure cut through (009) and (1000).	1.47m NE-SW x 0.30m NW-SE x 0.40m high (minimum).
Grave Plot 10 (Plate 11)		
1000	Sub-rectangular area of greyish-white mortary stone chippings, very compact. Located to SE side of (900), 0.88m below ground level (bgl). Upper fill of cut [1001], possibly related to construction of (900).	1.44m NE-SW x 1.60m NW-SE (min) x 0.25m thick.
1001	Roughly rectangular grave cut, evident as a void below (1000). Fragments of wood and arm bone (humerus?) visible within this void. Cuts (009).	1.44m NE-SW x 1.60m NW-SE x 0.40m deep (min).
Grave Plot 11 (Plate 12)		
1100	Remains of coffin, evident as a line of dark-brown rotten wood defining the NW side and NE and SW ends. Also a Yellowish-brown stain at NE end. Located approximately 8.00m NE of lych gate, 0.80m bgl. Within cut [1101].	1.70m NE-SW x 0.20m NW-SE (min).
1101	Grave cut for coffin (1100), evident to NW side and NE end of coffin remains. Filled by (1102). Cuts (009)	Cut is 0.10m wider than coffin remains at both side and end.
1102	Fill of cut [1101]. Reddish-brown clay.	
Grave Plot 12 (Plate 13)		
1200	Roughly rectangular area of mid-brown clay-silt coffin remains with fragments of wood and a whitish woven fabric defining the SW end. A copper-alloy shell-design decoration on the NW side and a hexagonal section handle visible on the NE side. Encountered at 0.53m bgl. Within cut [1201].	1.33m NE-SW (min) x 0.40m NW-SE.

CONTEXT NO.	DESCRIPTION	MEASUREMENTS
Grave Plot 12 continued		
1201	Grave cut for coffin remains (1200). Evident at NW side and SW end of (1200) only. Cuts (009).	Cut is 0.14m wider than coffin remains at both side and end.
1202	Fill of cut [1201]. Brownish-red clay.	
Grave Plot 13 (Plate 14)		
1300	Area of very loose mid-brown clay silt with skull and white plastic sheeting (possible coffin liner) partially visible at SW end. Backfill of grave cut [1301]? Encountered at 0.72m bgl.	1.03m NE-SW (min) x 0.28m NW-SE x 0.15m thick.
1301	Roughly rectangular grave cut containing human remains and silty fill (1300).	1.03m NE-SW (min) x 0.28m NW-SE x 0.15m deep (min).
Grave Plot 14 (Plate 15)		
1400	Area of loose mid-brown sandy silt containing fragments of wood and copper-alloy shell decorations. Visible in SE-facing section towards NE end of trench, and also partially in plan. Backfill of grave cut [1401]. Encountered at 0.77m bgl. Corresponds in location with grave stone 32C (Ethel Picker, died 1954).	0.98m NE-SW (min) x 0.10m NW-SE (min) x 0.32m thick.
1401	Cut for grave, defined by looser, collapsed fill material (1400) seen in section and also seen in plan as darker sub-rectangular area. Cuts (009).	
Grave Plot 15 (Plate 16)		
1500	Red brick structure seen in SE-facing section. Probably a burial vault. It incorporates a 0.18m thick, 0.30m wide stone slab at its SW end. Located at approximately 12.50m from the SW end of the church, 0.22m bgl. Construction of the vault has cut (009). In vicinity of grave stone 2C (Mary Baker, died 1943).	2.71m NE-SW x 0.40m high.

CONTEXT NO.	DESCRIPTION	MEASUREMENTS
Grave Plot 16		
1600	Sub-rectangular area of loose mid-brown sandy silt. Located immediately to the SE side of vault (1500), 0.62m bgl. Probable back-fill of grave. In vicinity of grave stone 2C.	1.80m NE-SW x 0.55m SW-NE
1601	Probable grave cut containing fill (1600). Cuts (009).	
Grave Plot 17 (Plate 17)		
1700	Rectangular area of loose dark-brown sandy silt containing fragments of wood and a corroded coffin handle. Located to the NE of vault (1500), 0.65m bgl. Probable back-fill of grave.	1.13m NE-SW x 0.39m NW-SE
1701	Probable grave cut containing fill (1700). Cuts (009).	

5.3.3 In addition to Trench 9, two further drainage trenches and associated sumps (10 & 11) were excavated on the north-west side of the church (Fig. 5).

5.3.4 Trench 10 was 0.65m wide x 0.47m to 0.55m deep and extended north-westwards from the church for 5.80m and terminated in a 2m x 2m drainage sump. Trench 11 was 0.70m wide x 0.75m to 1.30m deep and extended 8.20m south-westwards from the west corner of the new extension. Trench 11 also terminated in a sump, measuring 2.80m x 2.60m. The soil profile in both trenches comprised a 0.23m to 0.34m layer of topsoil (008) over reddish-brown sandy-clay (002). This varied only in the vicinity of the Trench 11 sump, which crossed the path leading from High Street up to the church. Here the soil profile consisted of :

(010) Tarmac path, 0.07m thick

(011) Yellowish-brown sand, 0.12m thick

- (012) Small stones in a matrix of very dark-brown silt, 0.12m thick.
- (013) Dark-brown silty clay containing frequent charcoal flecks, 0.10m thick.
- (002) Reddish-brown sandy-clay.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1** Excavations carried out in the course of constructing the new extension to St Barnabas Church, Erdington revealed evidence for a total of 17 grave plots, most previously unidentified. Of the eight grave plots uncovered in the area of the new extension, four of these were vaults and one was a possible brick-lined grave. Three more were indicated by *in-situ* grave stones, but no evidence regarding the type of burial marked was seen. Excavation of the main service trench to the south-west end of the church revealed evidence for seven earth-cut graves and two vaults, although the strategy to actively avoid burials meant that this was somewhat ephemeral in nature.
- 6.2** The vaults in the extension area were all constructed in a similar manner, with walls two bricks wide and an arched top. The side walls appeared to extend up beyond the vault tops, perhaps in order to support a monument or other superstructure. Means of access to the vaults was not evident, although the stone slab seen at the south-west end of vault (300), and indeed vault (1500) in Trench 9, may have served as a lintel to a blocked entrance. Where meaningful measurements could be taken, these showed the structures to vary between 1.30m (300) and 2.00m (600) in width (NW-SE) and to be at least 1.60m (300) in length (NE-SW); large enough to accommodate multiple burials, most likely family groups. Vault (100) was approximately 2.25m deep and enclosed five confined burials, arranged in two stacks.
- 6.3** The construction of a vault, or even a brick-lined grave, would have represented a considerably greater investment of time and money than a

simple earth-cut grave. For instance, at St Martin's in Birmingham, the charge for an earth-cut grave in 1848 was 6s 4d as opposed to £1 5s 6d for a brick-lined grave, £5 1s for vault in the churchyard and £5 10s for an vault within the church. Additional costs were also charged for subsequent interments within vaults as well as for the erection of headstones or other monuments (Adams, Butuex & Cherrington 2006, 228). The choice of a vault can therefore be understood as an expression of social status, particularly important during the Victorian period when success and respectability in life (measured in terms of wealth and possessions) were linked with salvation in the afterlife (Morley 1971, 11). The apparent concentration of vaults on the north-west side of the church may indicate a location favoured for higher status burials; a prominent position opposite the High Street but close to the church.

6.4 The view into vault (100) allowed a glimpse of the type of ornate, mass-produced coffin furniture produced throughout the 19th century. These included breastplates decorated with *fleur-de-lys* and coffin handles of geometric design. Coffin handles and/or shell-shaped embellishments were also evident in some of the earth-cut graves seen in Trench 9. A typical set of coffin furniture might include: one to four *deposita* (i.e. an inner and/or outer breastplate, a headplate and a footplate), lid motifs, escutcheons, grips (handles) and grip plates (Boston & Boyle 2005, 88). Many of these elements are still evident on coffins produced today. Despite the pre-occupation with class and status, the 19th century desire for a decent and respectable funeral meant that the use of such mass-produced coffin furniture did cut across social boundaries. The commercially-savvy funeral trade made sure that there was something to suit all classes and pockets (Litten 1992, 165).

6.5 Vault (100) is one of the few burials that could be securely associated with a named individual. The graveyard survey shows this vault to have been topped by a chest-tomb commemorating James Cartwright (d. 1843) along

with other members of his family. Unfortunately the tomb, bearing further information about the vault's inhabitants, was removed for safe-keeping for the duration of the construction work, so further biographical research could not be carried out. The use of a family vault, marked by a substantial monument would, however, suggest that the Cartwright family were from a respectable, well-off background and wished to indicate their higher social standing in death as well a life.

- 6.6** The other vaults encountered are also most likely of 19th century date, as is the inscribed grave stone (**400**) in memory of John Lucock (d. 1837) found in Trench 5, albeit re-used in later years. 20th-century burials are represented by Grave plot 14 which corresponds well in position with grave stone 32C to Ethel Picker (d. 1954), and also by (**1300**) with its plastic sheet coffin liner. Grave plots 15 and 16 were both in the vicinity of stone 2C, which commemorates Mary Baker (d. 1943), but neither could be definitively linked with this grave marker.
- 6.7** Several of the grave plots encountered showed signs of past disturbance. In Grave 10, the compact mortary upper fill (**1000**) may have been used to stabilise the grave prior to or during the construction of the adjacent vault (**900**). Most notably, however, the top of vault (**300**) had been badly damaged and the interior had been filled with broken grave stones, strongly suggesting an episode of deliberate clearance. The broken grave stones encountered in Trenches 3 and 5 are also likely to date from this episode. The general predominance of mid to late 20th-century grave stones in the part of the graveyard surrounding the church provides a possible early 20th-century date for this clearance.

8.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to the PCC of St Barnabas' Church, Erdington and to Rob Pell and Eric Knight of Linford Bridgeman Ltd. for their help on site. Thanks are also due to Charles Brown of Brownhill Hayward Brown and to Dr. Mike Hodder, Birmingham City Council Planning Archaeologist.

Map data is reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of H.M.S.O Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No. 10005511532.

9.0 References

Primary sources

Birmingham Archives - DR075A/2

Letter and account relating to the extension of Erdington churchyard and consecration thereof, 1891.

Secondary sources

Adams, J., Buteux, S. & Cherrington, R. 2006. 'St Martin's in Context: the church and funerals' in Brickley, M. & Buteux, S. (eds.) *St. Martin's uncovered: investigations in the churchyard of St. Martin's-in-the Bull Ring, Birmingham, 2001*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 221-228.

Boston, C. & Boyle, A. 2005. 'Burial practice and material culture' in Boyle, A., Boston, C., & Wilkin, A. (eds.) *The archaeological experience at St Luke's church, Old Street, Islington*. Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd., 82-127.

Cramp, R. 2009. *Archaeological Desk-based Assessment on a Development at St. Barnabas' Church, Erdington, Birmingham*. Stoke-on-Trent Archaeology Report No. 262.

Cramp, R. 2011. *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief: St. Barnabas' Church, Church Road, Erdington*. Cramp Sutherland Archaeological Services.

Hodder, M. 2010. *St. Barnabas' church, Church Road, Erdington (41099, 29171; HER MBM 201): Brief for an archaeological observation and recording during development as a condition of planning permission.* Birmingham City Council.

Jones, D.W. 1984a. *The Story of Erdington: From Sleepy Hamlet to Thriving Suburb.* Sutton Coldfield: Westwood Press Publications.

Jones, J.M. 1984b. *Manors of North Birmingham: An Introduction to the Historical Geography of Erdington.* Birmingham: City of Birmingham Education Department.

Litten, J. 1992. *The English way of Death, the common funeral since 1450.* London: Robert Hale Limited.

Morley, J. 1971. *Death, Heaven and the Victorians.* London: Studio Vista.

Stringer, K. 1999. *The Parish Church of St. Barnabas, Erdington: A Brief History and Guide.*

On-line sources

Heritage List – Parish Church of St. Barnabas (List No. 1076299)

URL <<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1076299>>

[date accessed: 26/11/12]



City of Birmingham

FIG. 1
Site location.

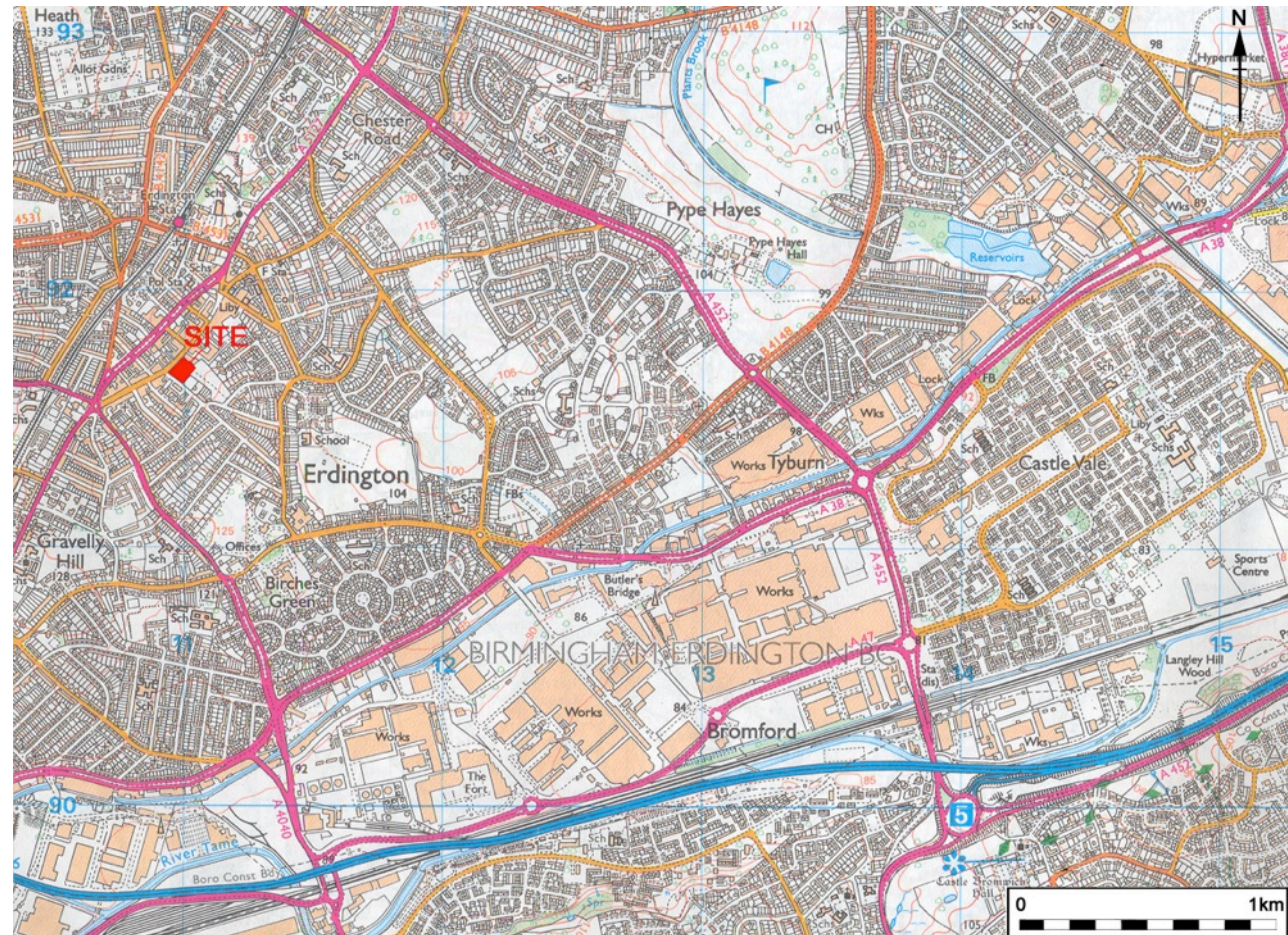




FIG. 2

Plan of the church, with the new extension area and associated service trenches marked in red.

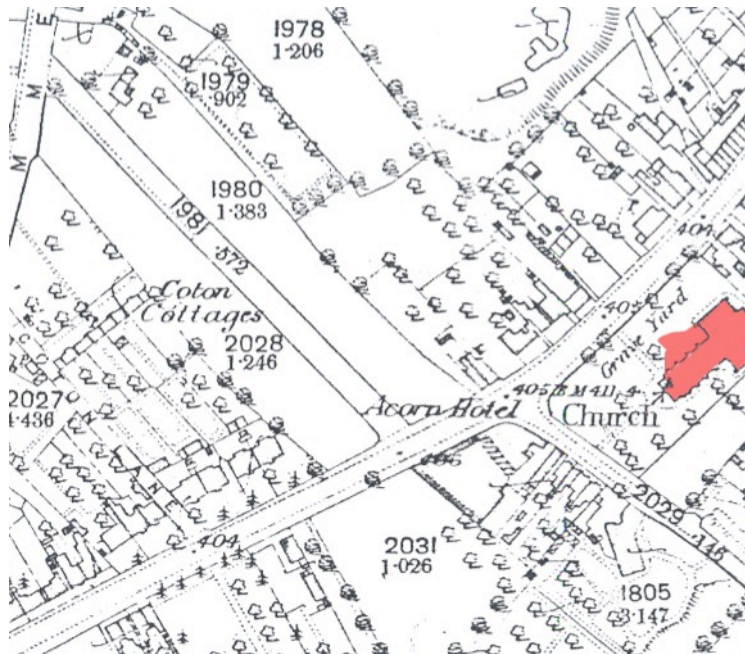


FIG. 3

Extract from the 1889 OS map with St Barnabas' Church and the extension area marked in red

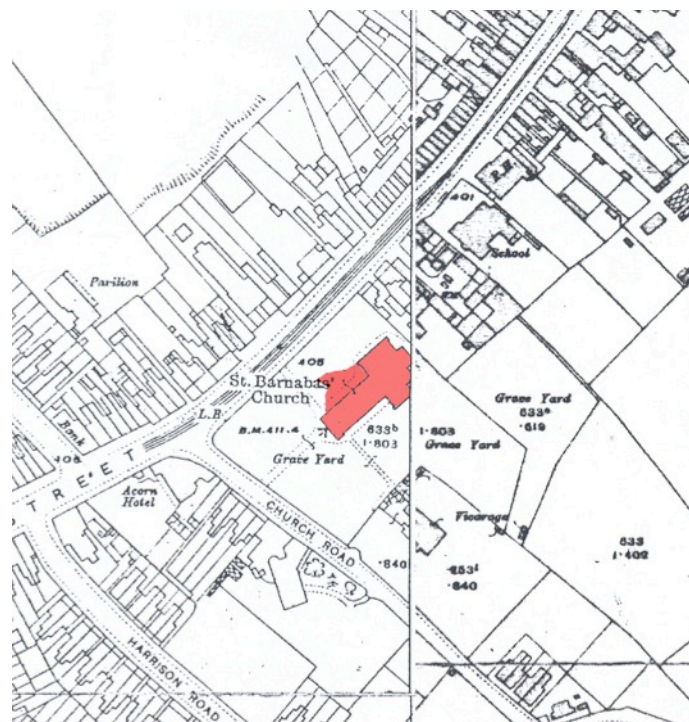


FIG. 4

Extract from the 1915 OS map with St Barnabas' Church and the extension area marked in red. The extended grave yard is now evident to the south-east.

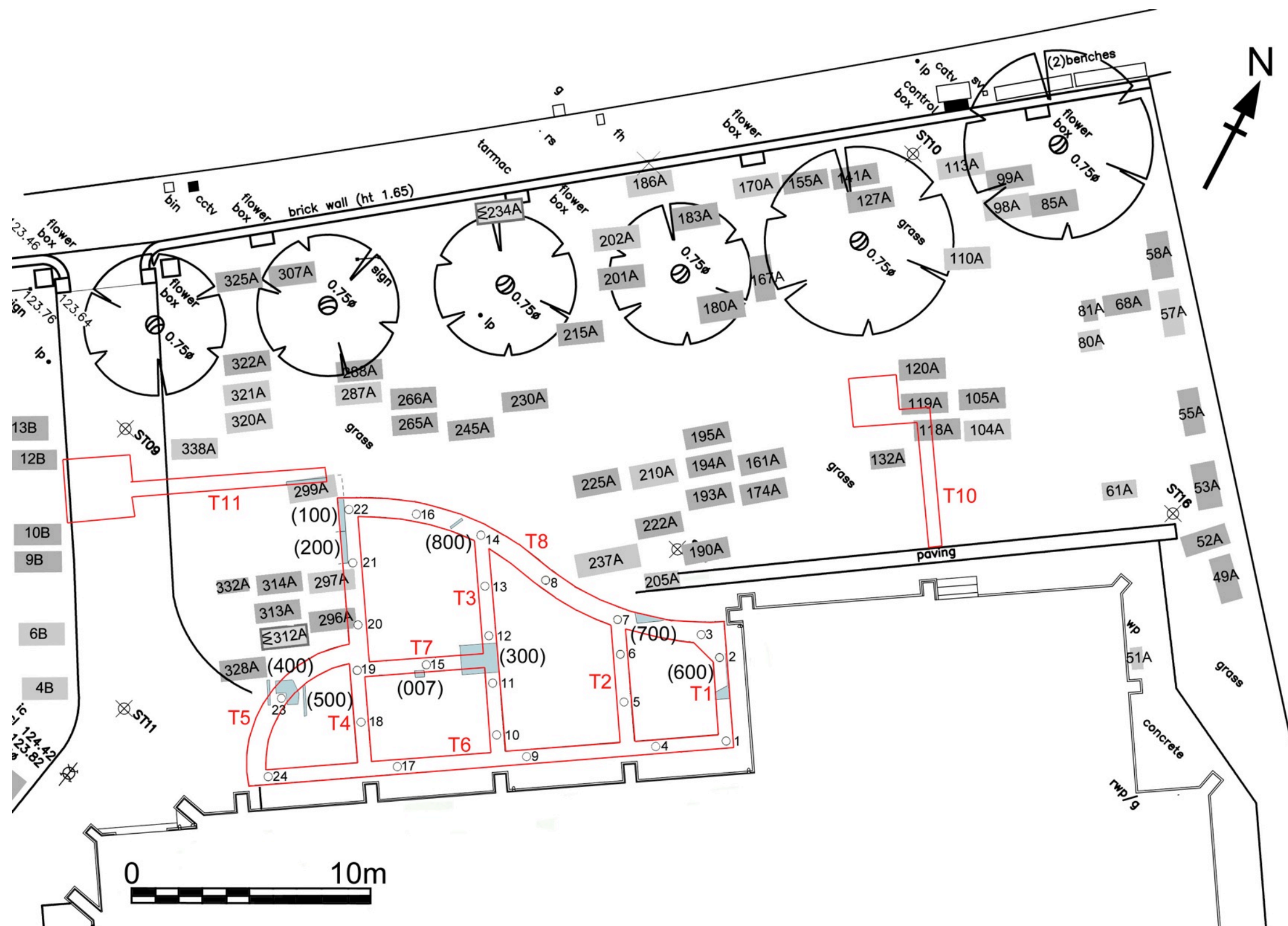


FIG. 5

Plan showing trenches excavated in the extension area and also Trenches 10 and 11

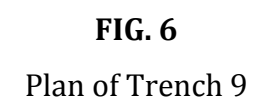




PLATE 1

Excavation around the pilings, looking north-east (scales: 1m)



PLATE 2

Vaults **(100)** (back) and **(200)** (front) looking north-west. (scales: 1m)



PLATE 3

The interior of vault (100) with coffin 3 to the left and coffin 5 to the right.



PLATE 4

The wall slots and metal bars supporting coffin 3



PLATE 5

The inserted slots on the north-west side of vault (100)



PLATE 6

Vault (300) looking south-west (scale: 1m)



PLATE 7

Broken grave stones within vault (300)



PLATE 8

Grave stone (400) looking north-east (scale: 1m)



PLATE 9

Vault (600) looking north-east (scale: 1m)



PLATE 10

Probable brick-lined grave (700) looking south-west (scale: 1m)



PLATE 11

Probable vault (900) alongside grave cut [1001] with upper fill of compact mortar (1000), looking north-east (scale: 1m)



PLATE 12

Grave plot 11 looking north-east (scale: 1m)



PLATE 13

Grave plot 12 looking north-east (scale: 1m)



PLATE 14

Grave plot 13 looking north-east (scale: 1m)



PLATE 15

Grave plot 14, visible in the south-east facing section of Trench 9 as an area of collapse (scale: 1m)



PLATE 16

Vault (1500) looking north (scale: 1m)



PLATE 17

Grave plot 17 looking north-east (scale: 1m)