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**ST. HELEN'S CHURCH,
SKELTON-ON-URE,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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ABSTRACT

On 20th June 1999 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief at St. Helen's Church, Skelton-on Ure, North Yorkshire on behalf of the Parochial Church Council. The upper levels of two possible grave cuts and the construction trench for the south wall of St. Helen's Church were observed during the construction of a vestry against the south wall of the church.

1. INTRODUCTION

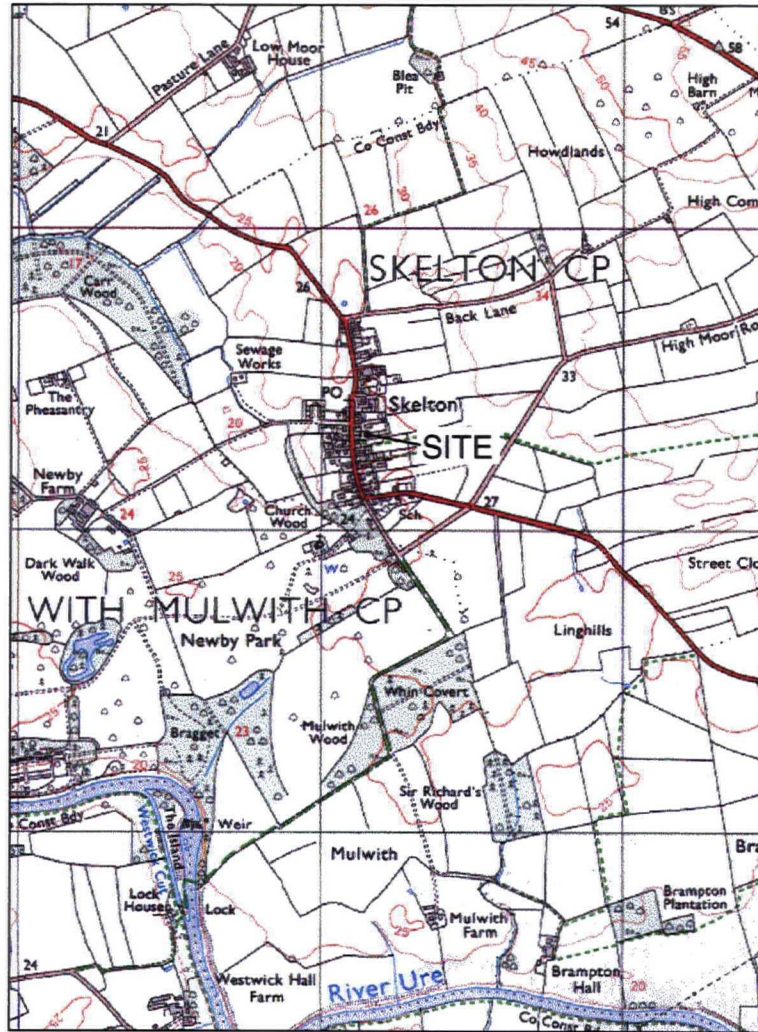
On the 20th June 1999, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief during alterations to St. Helen's Church, Skelton-on-Ure, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 360 679) (Figure 1) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council.

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The alterations involved the hand excavation of a 0.50m wide, 0.72m deep foundation trench for the construction of a new vestry on the east side of the south wall of the church (Figure 2). The sole contractors for the work were A.J. Hawkrige & Sons.

The deposits encountered were recorded as a drawn section at a scale of 1:10 and described using pro-forma context recording sheets with a series of 35mm colour print photographs taken.

The site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under their accession code YORAT: 1999.11.



Scale 1:25,000

BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:25000 MAP DATA WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK. YO17FG. LICENCE NUMBER AL854123

Figure 1, Site location plan

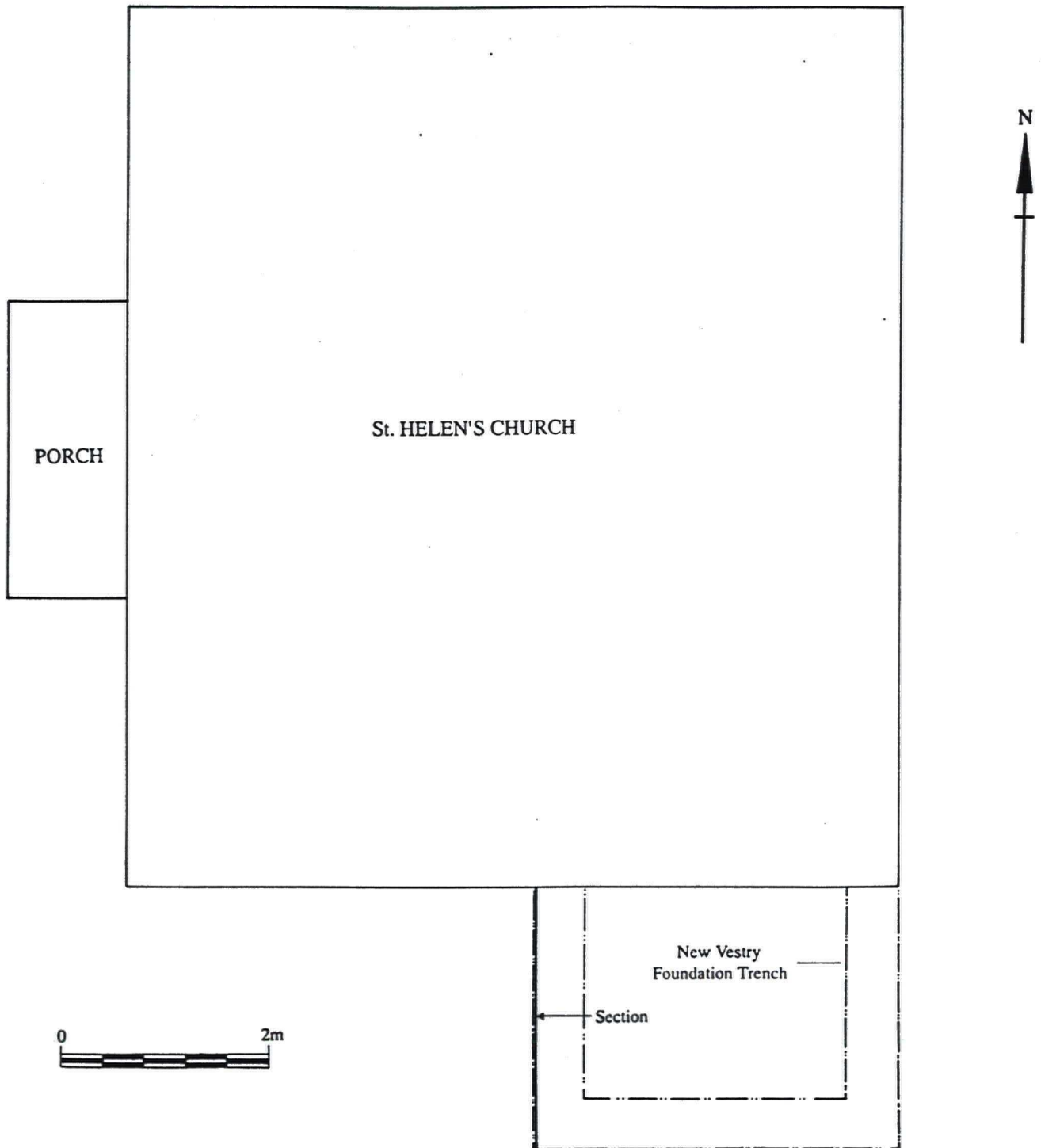


Figure 2, Location of Foundation Trench and Section

2. RESULTS

The earliest material seen was a natural deposit consisting of a plastic mid orange brown clay sand (117) (Figure 3) with inclusions of small pebbles and decayed sandstone flecks. This was observed at 0.15m BGL (metres Below Ground Level), was excavated to a depth of 0.57m and was seen to continue beyond the base of the excavated area.

This had been truncated by two cuts, 115 and 116. Cut 116 was 0.59m wide and in excess of 0.56m deep with steep, almost vertical, sides and contained a back-fill of friable mid greyish brown sandy clay silt (106) with inclusions of occasional charcoal flecks and small pebbles. Cut 115 had a similar profile to 116 and contained a similar back-fill (114) but had been heavily truncated by a series of later intrusions. The earliest of these, cut 111, was thought to be the construction cut for the south wall of St. Helen's Church. This was 0.26m wide and 0.26m deep, had a wide 'U' shaped profile and contained a foundation consisting of two courses of roughly worked sandstone (112) bonded with a soft white flecked pale brown lime mortar. The cut was filled with a construction cut back-fill (110) which consisted of a dark brown gritty clay silt containing frequent small charcoal fragments and moderate charcoal flecks.

Wall foundation 112 supported the upper courses of the south wall of the church which was constructed from large sandstone blocks (113), some of which were obviously machine cut, bonded with a hard off white mortar.

Context 110 had been truncated by a clearance cut (109) 0.85m wide and 0.29m deep with a steep southern side and a flat uneven base which contained a primary fill consisting of a fine pebbly gravel in a matrix of mid brown gritty clay silt sand (108). This, and the southern face of wall 113, was sealed by the upper fill of cut 109 which consisted of a dark grey gritty clay silt (107) with inclusions of occasional small sandstone fragments and very small brick or tile fragments.

Both contexts 106 and 107 lay directly beneath a compacted friable dark grey gritty sandy clay silt, 0.06 to 0.15m thick, (105) which either represents an earlier trampled earth path or the make up for the overlying extant gravel path.

The southern edge of context 105 had been truncated by a 'U' shaped construction cut 0.06m wide and 0.09m deep which contained a path edging of sand stone slabs (101) and was back-filled with a loose coarse grained sand (103).

Context 103 was sealed to the north of edging 101 by a 0.09m thick path of fine angular gravel, (100) and to the south by a top-soil consisting of a dark grey brown sandy clay silt, 0.07m thick, (102) beneath grass, which forms the present day surface to the graveyard.

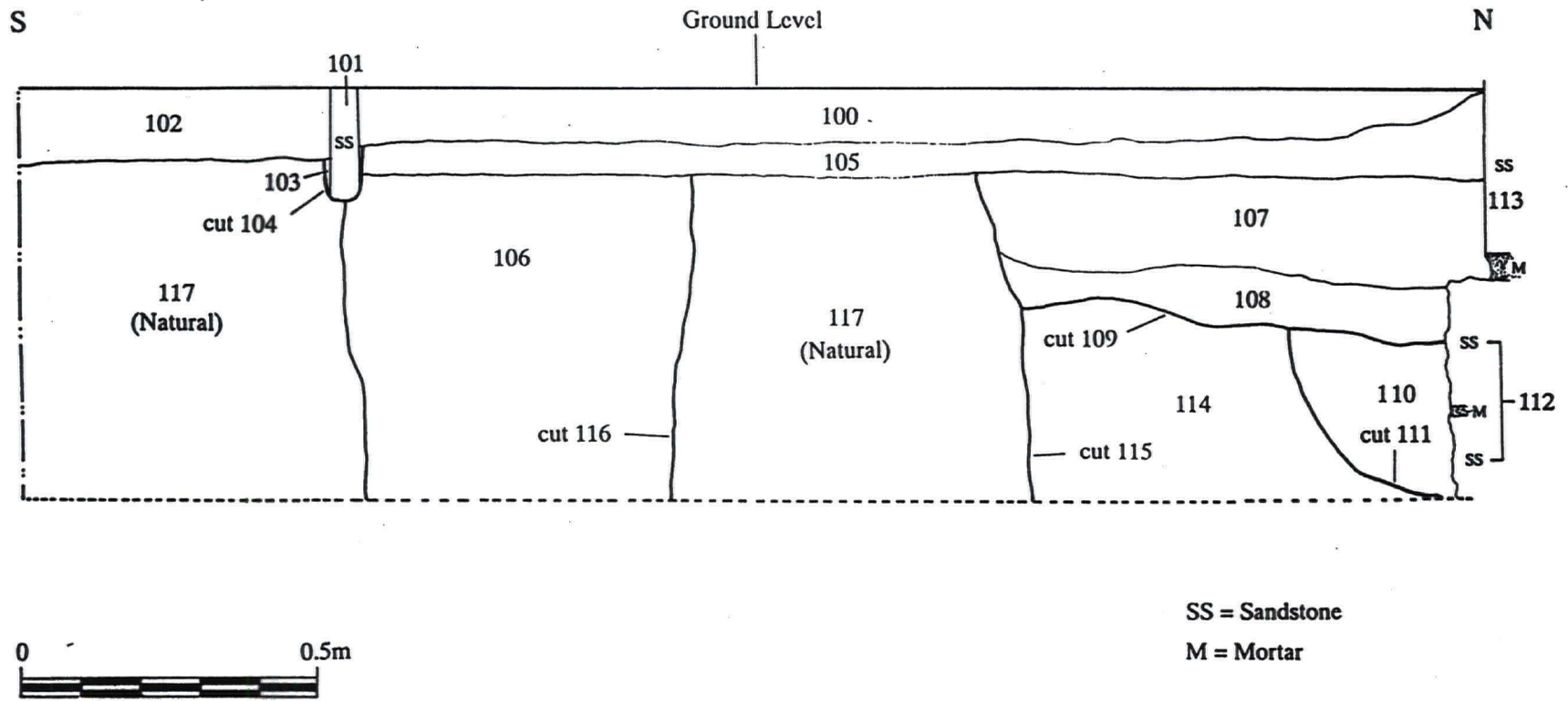


Figure 3, East Facing Section

3. CONCLUSIONS

The natural sub-soil had been truncated by cuts 115 and 116. Although these were not fully excavated their profiles, dimensions and east-west alignment strongly suggested that they were both grave cuts. The fact that cut 111, the construction cut for the south wall of St. Helen's Church, had truncated the back-fill of cut 115 suggested that the grave yard was already in use prior to the construction of the current church building.

The two roughly worked foundation courses of the church (112) were sealed by a back-fill of charcoal rich clay silt (110) which had been truncated by clearance cut 109 which may relate to repairs or maintenance to the foundations of the church. This may have involved the replacement of eroded stone work. The sandstone block directly above the foundations was bonded with a different mortar and had clearly been machine cut. Elsewhere in the walls of the church there was a mix of both machine cut and badly eroded stone which may indicate that selected areas of stone work have been replaced.

The primary (108) and upper fill (107) of cut 109 both ran up to and sealed the southern face of the church wall. Contexts 107 and 106 were both sealed by a compacted sandy clay silt (105) which may represent a trampled earthen path along the south side of the church, or, more likely, the make up for the present day gravel path (100), re-instated after any repairs had been carried out.

The southern edge of the gravel path was retained by a low sandstone kerb (101). The shallow construction cut for this had truncated the southern edge of this make-up and was back-filled with sand before the path was formed. On the southern side of the kerb the back fill of its construction cut was sealed by a top soil under turf which constitutes the present day surface of the grave yard. The kerb construction cut probably also truncated the topsoil but, due to weathering and/or worm action, this cut was not visible.

4. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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