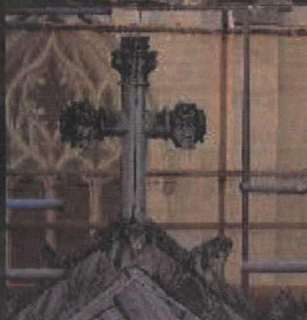
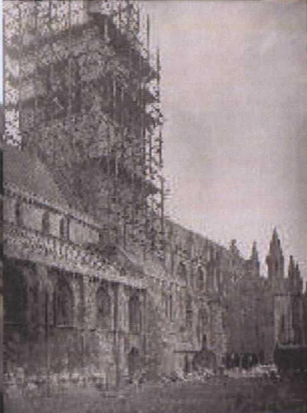




SELBY ABBEY  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF

REPORT  
NOVEMBER 2010







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SNY	19590
ENY	6705
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Parish	8099
Rec'd	31/8/11

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**  
SELBY ABBEY  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

SITE CODE: SBB 10  
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NGR: SE 46159 43235

**REPORT**  
November 2010





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## Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Selby Abbey during groundworks required for the refurbishment of the redundant boiler house into lavatory facilities. The works also required the installation of new drainage against the east wall of the Latham Chapel and north wall of the north choir of the Abbey (NGR: SE 6159 3235). Fieldwork was carried out on behalf of Simonsheriff Architects for Selby Abbey PCC, and was undertaken between the 29th and 30th September 2010.

The existing floor of the boiler house was removed and the floor make-up dug out to a depth of c.0.5m while a section of existing drain was refurbished. All groundworks were subject to archaeological monitoring. No *in situ* archaeological deposits were encountered, having been removed during the construction of the boiler house in the early 20th century. Disarticulated human bone, medieval pottery, fragments of architectural and funerary stone, window glass and lead came were recovered residually from the make-up of the boiler house floor. The disarticulated human bone recovered during monitoring has been reburied on site.

## Acknowledgements

FAS would like to thank Simmonsherriff Architects and Selby Abbey PCC for their support and the groundworks contractors for their cooperation during fieldwork.



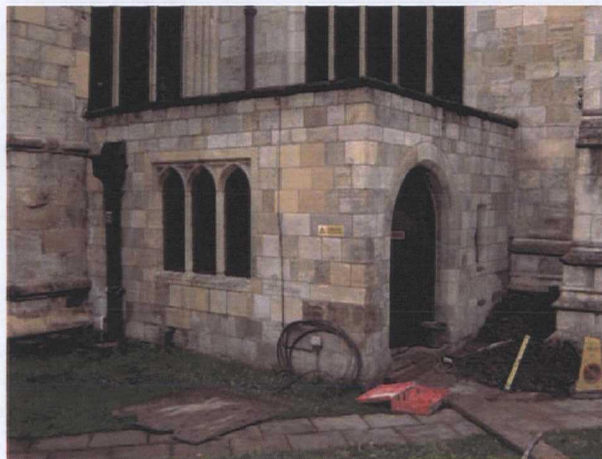
## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Selby Abbey during groundworks required for the conversion of the redundant boiler house into lavatories. The works also required installation of new drainage against the east wall of the Latham Chapel and north wall of the north choir of the Abbey (NGR: SE 6159 3235). Fieldwork was carried out on behalf of Simonsheriff Architects for Selby Abbey PCC, and was undertaken between the 29th and 30th September 2010.

### 1.1 LOCATION AND LAND USE

Selby Abbey is located immediately south of the historic town centre of Selby, at the junction of The Crescent, New Street and Park Street. The Abbey church stands within a grassed area enclosed by iron railings, and is the sole above-ground survivor of the medieval abbey site (Figure 1; NGR: SE 46159 43235).

The redundant boiler house is located at the junction between the east wall of the Latham Chapel and north wall of the north choir (Plate 1). The short length of drain replaced was situated on the north side of the boiler house, against the west wall of the Latham Chapel.



**Plate 1** Redundant boiler house at Selby Abbey

### 1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The watching brief aimed to observe and monitor all groundworks required for the refurbishment of the boiler house as lavatory facilities and associated replacement of drainage and to record and characterise any archaeological remains exposed. The watching brief also sought to guide the depth of excavation of the boiler house floor in order to avoid the disturbance of burials.

### 1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Selby Abbey is believed to have been founded *c.*1070 by William the Conqueror, on the site of a hermitage occupied by William of Auxerre, at Church Hill. In a charter of that year, William granted Benedict land on which to build the abbey. However, due to the austerity of Benedict's leadership, he was forced to resign in *c.*1097, and in an attempt to revive morale, the second abbot, Hugh, decided not only to rebuild the existing monastic house in stone, but to relocate it away from the river to its present site.

The new abbey church was constructed on ground made up of layers of clay and sand, the water table lying only three feet below present ground level. This has, at times, seriously affected the stability of the structure, most notably causing the sinking of the tower which resulted in severe distortion in the arches of the nave. The





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Location map

Scale 1:5000



Figure 1



church has been attributed traditionally to several distinct phases of building (Figure 2). The first elements of the church to be erected in the Norman period, were the central tower, the first two bays of the nave to the level of the triforium, and the accompanying bays of the aisles. This was followed by the construction of the north transept, along with the south, and then the third and fourth bays of the nave. The last sections of 12th-century work, in 'Transitional' style, included the four westernmost bays of the nave, the west front, and the remaining triforium and aisle on the north.

'English Gothic' is represented by the six westernmost bays of the southern triforium and clerestory, the construction of which completed the monastic church. It has been stated traditionally that it was not until the early 14th century that building began again, to replace the existing apsidal east end with a much larger, seven bay choir. The north and south aisle walls of the nave were also refenestrated. Unfortunately, the surviving bursars' and fabric keepers' accounts for Selby post-date much of this work.

There is some documentary evidence to suggest that construction work was under way by 1291, when the abbey acquired a charter from the Prior of Marton to quarry three acres of stone in Thevesdale near Tadcaster, (CB I, 317-18). This work might have been disrupted by the war with Scotland, both because of general economic disruption and the increase in tax burden. A papal bull of 1306 granted Selby the right to appropriate the church at Adlingfleet, and the income of the church was to be used for a construction project the abbey was undertaking (CB I, 343-44). However, a visitation in 1324 found the abbey in a poor financial state, and ordered that they should either construct the new choir or repair the old one as this had been the intention for the use of funds from Adlingfleet. (Borthwick, Reg. 9A - Archbishop Melton, fol. 202v.).

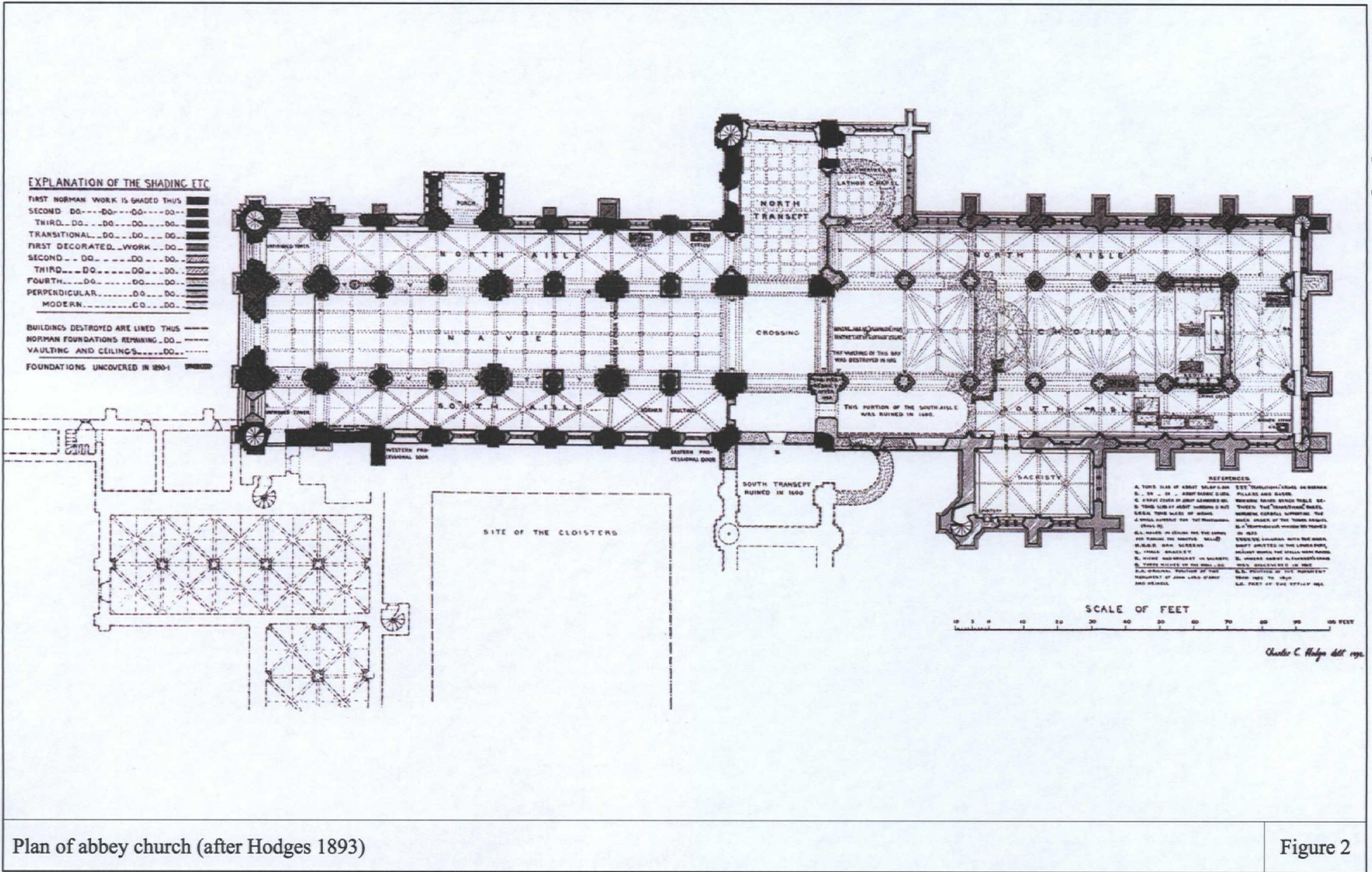
A fire is believed to have ruined parts of the chapterhouse, dormitory, treasury and church in c.1340 (Solloway 1925, 27); Haslop has provided strong documentary evidence that this was in 1344 (Haslop 1958, 451). In 1346 the abbey obtained the right to appropriate the church at Brayton in order to use the income for repairs to the abbey church, which was described as ruinous while the buildings destroyed by fire (Papal Registers - Petitions, vol.1,117).

The abbey was granted a licence to crenellate in November 1375 (CPR 1374-77, 192), possibly a response to an outbreak of violence against the abbey in the summer of that year. If the licence was acted upon work would undoubtedly have focussed on the precinct wall, a section of which survives to the east of the abbey church, in addition to other buildings such as the precinct gatehouses.

Selby Abbey was dissolved in December of 1539. Many of the monastic buildings were either stripped of resaleable material, dismantled or left to decay. Apart from the church, the only survivors were some agricultural buildings and the monastic gateway facing onto The Crescent, demolished in 1806.

The monastic church gained official status as a parish church in 1618, but without the income of the abbey to maintain its fabric, the building fell into decay. Combined with the effects of the unstable ground beneath, this neglect resulted in the collapse of the central tower in 1690. The damage was extensive, not only to the central tower but to the south transept and the western end of the choir. A replacement bell tower was erected in 1702, while the west front was repaired in 1734. Extensive repair work was undertaken to the choir in the early 1890s





Plan of abbey church (after Hodges 1893)

Figure 2



and in 1902 it was decided to reduce the height of the central tower, on account of the instability of its foundations. However, the most damage was done in 1906, when a fire started in the Latham chapel, destroying the church roofs, choir screen, and affected masonry throughout. Repairs began immediately on the nave, and work on the choir and upper tower followed soon after. This scheme also resurrected a south transept. In 1935, the west front was heightened, retaining and reinstating the pinnacles and parapet at the top of the new towers. The entire church was cleaned in the 1970s when further repairs to the fabric were undertaken.

Although some excavation of the area within and around the abbey church has been undertaken in the past, this work has not, generally speaking, been recorded in any detail. The northern end of the west claustral range, for example, was excavated in the 1870s, but no records of this have been published, other than the inclusion of some foundations on Solloway's plan. Fragments of the Romanesque east end were uncovered during the 1890s (Fernie 1995, 41). The remains of the monastic gateway, demolished in 1806, were recently encountered during refurbishment of the Crescent.

The boiler house, constructed in the angle formed by the north wall of the north choir aisle and Latham Chapel, was erected in the early 20th century.

## 2.0 FIELDWORK PROCEDURE

Groundworks required the excavation of the floor within the boiler house by *c.*0.5m, in addition to excavation of an existing drainage run in order to replace old drainpipes. Excavation was carried out by hand under archaeological supervision. Excavation was undertaken in 0.10m spits to the required depth, upcast was carefully inspected for cultural material. The drain trench backfill and upcast were inspected for disarticulated human remains which were collected for reburial.

Photographic recording was undertaken and consisted of monochrome 35mm and digital colour photography.

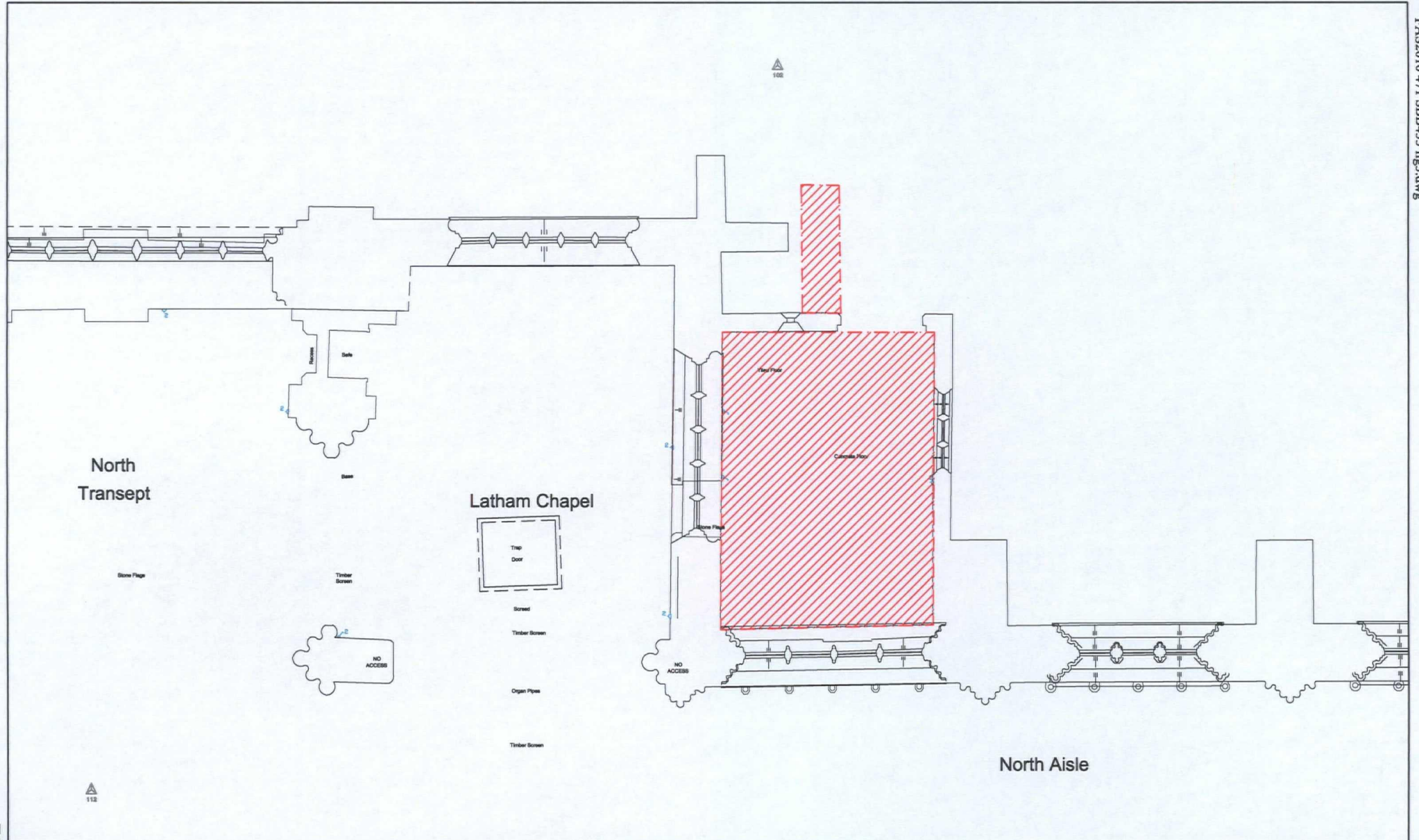
## 3.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

### 3.1 BOILER HOUSE FLOOR

The modern concrete boiler house floor was broken up, removed and the exposed floor make-up cleaned to identify any possible features (Figure 3). The floor make-up consisted of entirely modern material and was removed in 0.10m spits to the required depth of *c.*0.5m below the boiler house floor level of *c.*6.3m AOD down to *c.*5.8m AOD. No features were encountered other than modern services, but the full height of the medieval moulded plinths in the west and south walls was exposed (Plates 2 and 3).

A small quantity of disarticulated human bone was recovered from the excavation and set aside for reburial. Six pieces of worked stone were recovered from the upcast, two of which were from funerary monuments, probably fragments from headstones. One stone had the words 'this life' inscribed upon it, presumably part of





Location of the boiler house and foul drain

Scale 1:200



Figure 3