

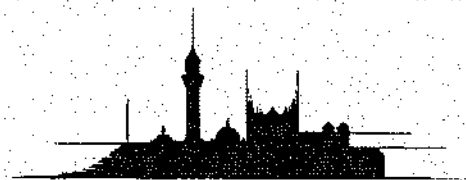
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*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**The Church of St Mary the Virgin, Bilston,
West Midlands:**

An Archaeological Watching Brief 1998

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 557
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**The Church of St Mary the Virgin , Bilston, West Midlands:
an Archaeological Watching Brief 1998**

by
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THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, BILSTON, WEST MIDLANDS

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 1998

1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the aims, methodology and results of an archaeological watching brief within the churchyard adjoining the Church of St Mary the Virgin, at Bilston, West Midlands. Four trenches and soakaway holes were dug as part of a re-development scheme at the church. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were identified.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching-brief within the churchyard adjoining the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Bilston, West Midlands (NGR SO 954962: Figs. 1-2). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit were commissioned to undertake the watching brief by Fellows and Jones Ltd, Darlaston. The work was undertaken during the construction of four new soakaway trenches and sumps in October 1998.

The purpose of the watching brief was to identify and record any surviving archaeological deposits or features affected by the groundwork's associated with the new drainage features.

3.0: METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)

Four trenches were excavated by machine. Trench 1, aligned approximately north-east/south-west, measured 27.9m by 0.4m, and reached a depth of 0.6m. The wall of the church provided the south-western extent of the trench which continued to an existing manhole at the north-eastern extreme. Trench 2, aligned approximately north-east/south-west, measured 1.9m by 0.4m and reached a depth of 0.4m. A new soakaway hole was dug at the north-eastern extent of the trench and measured 1.9m by 1.7m, and reached a depth of 1.2m. Trench 3, aligned approximately east/west, measured 6.9m by 0.65m and reached a depth of 0.5m. At the eastern extent of the trench a new soakaway hole was dug measuring 2.1m by 2.1m, and reached a depth of 1.2m. Trench 4, aligned approximately north-east/south-west, measured 3m by 0.65m and reached a depth of 0.4m. At the south-western extent of the trench a new soakaway hole was dug measuring 1.7m by 1.5m and reached a depth of 1.2m. All trenches were dug to the specifications of the contractors.

Recording was by means of pre-printed proformas for trenches, scaled-drawn sections where necessary and supported by monochrome print photography, all held in the archive.

4.0: THE SITE

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin is situated on Oxford Street, Bilston, West Midlands. The church was constructed by Francis Goodwin between 1827-9. It is a commissioners' church and is in Gothic style. There is a western tower octagonal-shaped on top with eight pinnacles. Inside there is a polygonal apse and no structural chancel. It has three galleries on iron columns (Pevsner, 1974). The churchyard appears to have been in use since the construction of the church.

5.0: RESULTS

Trench 1 (Fig. 3): Due to the limited depth of excavation (maximum of 0.6m below the modern ground surface) the uppermost horizon of the natural subsoil was not encountered. The lowest layer in the trench was a dark brown sandy silt with charcoal, disturbed by tree roots (1003). Patches of building debris (1004, 1005 and 1006) with mortar, gravel and brick were also present within the sandy silt. This deposit was overlain by a dark, organic rich silt, highly disturbed by tree roots (1002). At the north-western end of the trench this upper horizon comprised a modern building debris with mortar and brick fragments (1000). All deposits contained modern finds such as twentieth century pottery, plastic bottles and tin cans. Three cattle bones were recovered. There was no evidence of human remains.

Trench 2: Due to the depth of excavation (maximum of 1.2m in the soakaway hole) the uppermost horizon of the natural subsoil was not encountered. The stratigraphy was a series of alternate building debris deposits and topsoil. Again all deposits contained very modern finds. There was no evidence of human remains.

Trench 3: The natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 1m in the soakaway hole. This consisted of a yellow/orange silty clay overlying a highly weathered bedrock. The 1m of the trench nearest the church consisted of a building debris/topsoil mix overlain by a building debris layer. The stratigraphy in the other 7m of trench also comprised of alternate topsoil and building debris deposits. The only feature in the trench was a brick dome-shaped linear structure running north-west/south-east (parallel to the church). It measured 1.5m across and continued under the baulks and was overlain by topsoil and building debris. Only the top of the feature was exposed. All deposits again contained modern finds. There was no evidence of human remains.

Trench 4: Due to the depth of excavation (maximum of 1.2m in soakaway hole), the uppermost horizon of the natural subsoil was not encountered. The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a brown sandy silt containing building debris, overlain by a mortar layer. This in turn was overlain by a dark organic silty topsoil. In the southern side of the soakaway hole the remains of a brick wall was recorded. The orientation of the wall suggested that it was connected with the churchyard wall. On the other side of the wall the lowermost deposit was a brownish silty layer, which was overlain by a similar deposit containing brick fragments. This was overlain by a reddish sandy layer, which could also have been associated with the churchyard wall. Overlying both the sandy deposit and the remains of the wall was a dark, organic silty topsoil.

Again modern finds were recovered from the deposits. There was no evidence of human remains.

6.0: DISCUSSION

All deposits in Trenches 1 and 2 appear to be modern and are not associated with burials or church construction. The brick feature in Trench 3 could possibly be the roof of a burial vault, but as so little was revealed in the excavation, and the feature has been left *in situ*, it is impossible to be certain. Similarly, the brick wall in Trench 4 appears to be associated with the churchyard wall, but as so little was revealed its function cannot be properly ascertained.

7.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork was commissioned by Fellows and Jones (Builders) Ltd. We thank the foreman Mr Martin Hill for his assistance on site. The project was managed by Gwilym Hughes. The fieldwork was carried out by Josh Williams. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

8.0: REFERENCES

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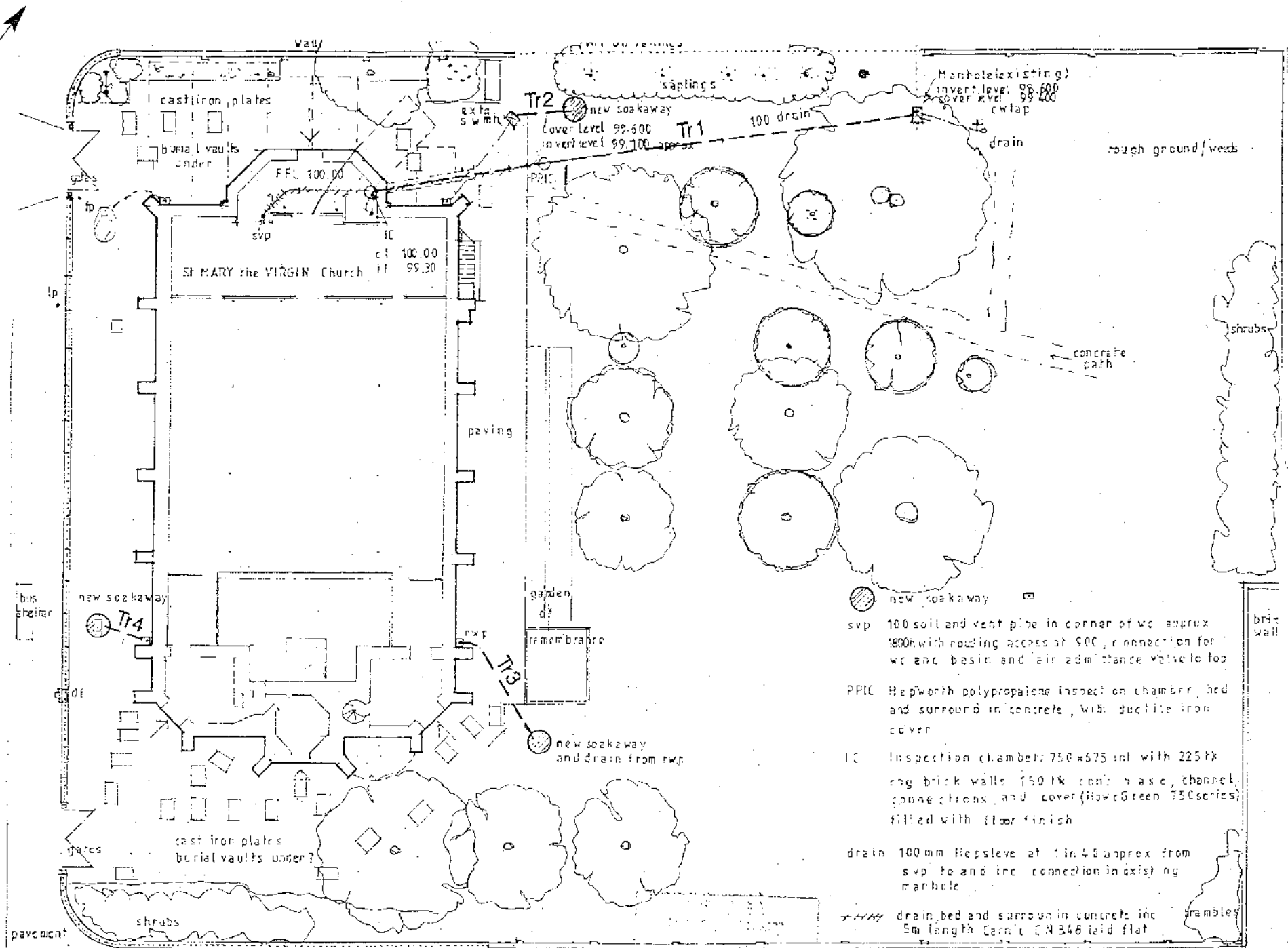


Fig.2

0 10m

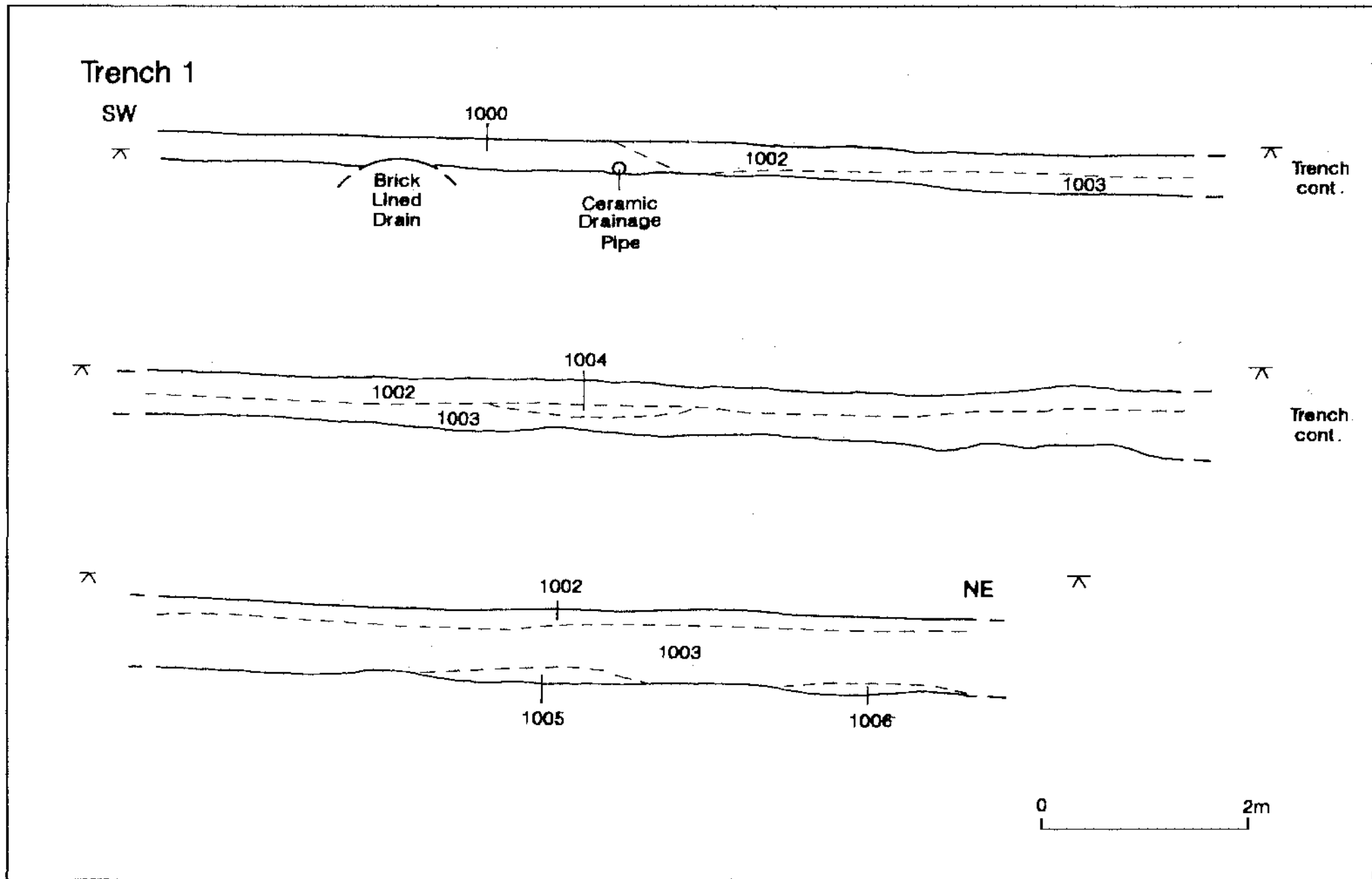


Fig.3