SUFFOLK ARCHAEOLOGY

• A HISTORY OF EXPERTISE •

St. Andrews Church, Aldringham Cum Thorpe

Client:
Aldringham PCC

Date:
October 2015

ARG 015
Archaeological Evaluation Report
SACIC Report No. 2015/073
Author: Stuart Boulter

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Author: Stuart Boulter

Contributions By: N/A

Illustrator: Stuart Boulter

Editor: Rhodri Gardner

Report Date: October 2015

HER Information

Site Code:	**ARG 015**
Site Name:	**St. Andrews Church**
Report Number	**2015/073**
Planning Application No:	**N/A**
Date of Fieldwork:	**7th October 2015**
Grid Reference:	**TM 4517 6028**
Oasis Reference:	**suffolka1-226047**
Curatorial Officer:	**N/A**
Senior Project Officer:	**Stuart Boulter**
Client/Funding Body:	**Aldringham PCC**
Client Reference:	**N/A**

Digital report submitted to Archaeological Data Service:
http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit

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Prepared By: Stuart Boulter
Date: October 2015

Approved By: Rhodri Gardner
Position: Managing Director
Date: October 2015
Signed: ……

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Summary

A series of four Test-pits were excavated: two aimed primarily at investigating whether internal damp problems originated from leaking drains and their associated features. All of the Test-pits were excavated to the depth of the base of the bonded component of the nave and chancel walls with a view to informing any future remediation of the damp problem.

The results indicated that the level of the base of the wall reflected the natural east to west slope of the site and was either itself sloped or, more likely, stepped.

A layer of gravel-rich render recorded in all four pits was consistent with a more weathered layer previously recorded above ground and thought to be relatively early in date, possibly even contemporary with the earliest component of the walls. The depth at which this render continued below ground suggested that the ground level of the churchyard had risen significantly, possibly as the result of bulking up caused by the repeated excavation of graves.

1. Introduction

The internal walls of the chancel and nave of St. Andrews Church, Aldringham (Fig. 1) are suffering from damp. Aldringham PCC have asked Brian Haward (Haward Architects) to investigate a means by which the water ingress causing the damp problem could be identified and alleviated.

Following discussions with the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (Bob Carr), it was decided that two existing drain-heads adjacent to the south nave and chancel wall would be re-opened, with the pits extended in order to deduce the depth of the wall base. In addition, two further pits were to be excavated; one adjacent to the east chancel wall and the other towards the eastern end of the north chancel wall. The work was to be carried out by professional archaeologists.

Subsequently, Suffolk Archaeology CIC (hereafter SACIC) were commissioned by Haward Architects, on behalf of their client (Aldringham PCC) to undertake the work, the fieldwork for which was carried out on 7th October 2015.

2. Geology and topography

The church lies at *c.*10 metres OD on the north side of a west facing spur of land on the side of the valley of the Hundred River which passes the site *c.*200 metres to the west.

The underlying drift geology comprises glaciofluvial sands and gravels.

3. Historical and Archaeological background

The original 12th century church on the site was constructed by Ralph de Glanville (Mortlock 1992, 5), although there is no direct evidence that any of the standing structure can be attributed as being part of this building. The existing church comprises an undifferentiated nave and chancel, a south porch and vestry to the north.

By the middle of the 19th century, the church had fallen into disrepair. The tower and part of the nave had collapsed and services were taken in the thatched chancel and

east end of the nave, the latter furnished with a tiled hipped roof over its eastern end and, presumably, an inserted west wall. Major restoration works were undertaken during the second half of the 19th century, including the total removal of the tower, the construction of a south porch, a small vestry to the north and a new west end to the nave.

After an archaeological trial-trenching evaluation was carried out, during which six intact burials were encountered at depths of between 0.70 and 1.20 metres, a modern vestry was constructed on the north side of the existing Victorian vestry (Gardner 2002, SCCAS Rpt. No. 2002/108).

In advance of the submission for a Faculty to undertake a programme of consolidation and repair to the exterior of the nave and chancel, a programme of archaeological recording was undertaken by Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service Field Projects Team in 2009 (Boulter 2009).

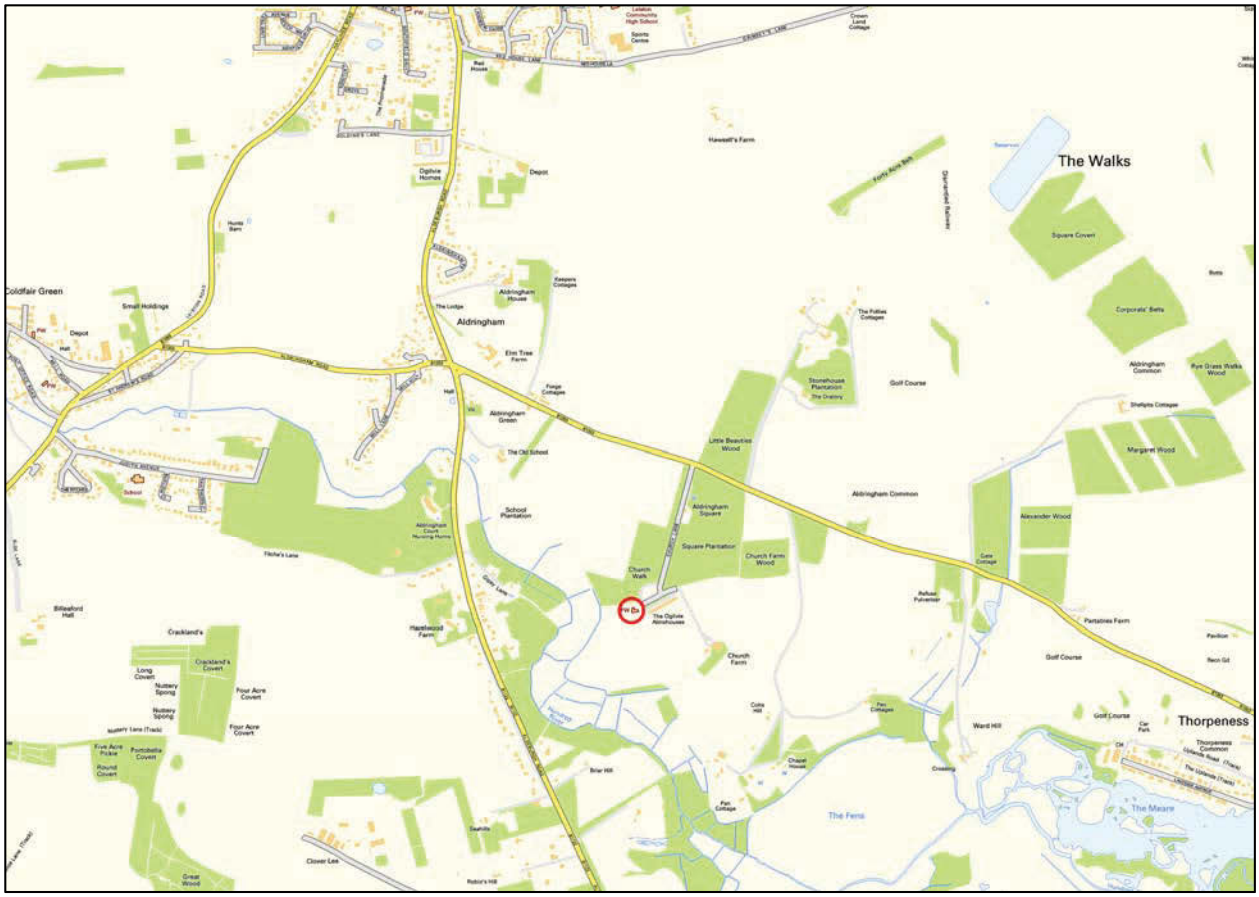

Figure 1. Location map (St. Andrews Church circled in red)

4. Methodology

The locations for the four test-pits were provided to SACIC during a site meeting with the project architect (Brian Haward) (Fig. 2).

Trenches were hand excavated down to the base of the bonded wall fabric.

Plans and section drawings were executed on plastic drafting film at a scale of 1:20 and a series of high resolution digital photographs were taken. The trench locations were plotted in relation to previously recorded above ground architectural features (Boulter 2009).

Observations made during the recording process were noted down adjacent to the relevant drawings.

After a full record was made and the pits had been inspected by the architect, they were filled in sequentially and reinstated as far as possible to their previous condition.

Post-excavation works included adding the photographs to SACIC's photographic archive, digitising the plans and sections and preparing this report.

In addition, the project details were submitted to OASIS, the online archaeological database of grey literature archaeological reports under the code suffolka1-226047.

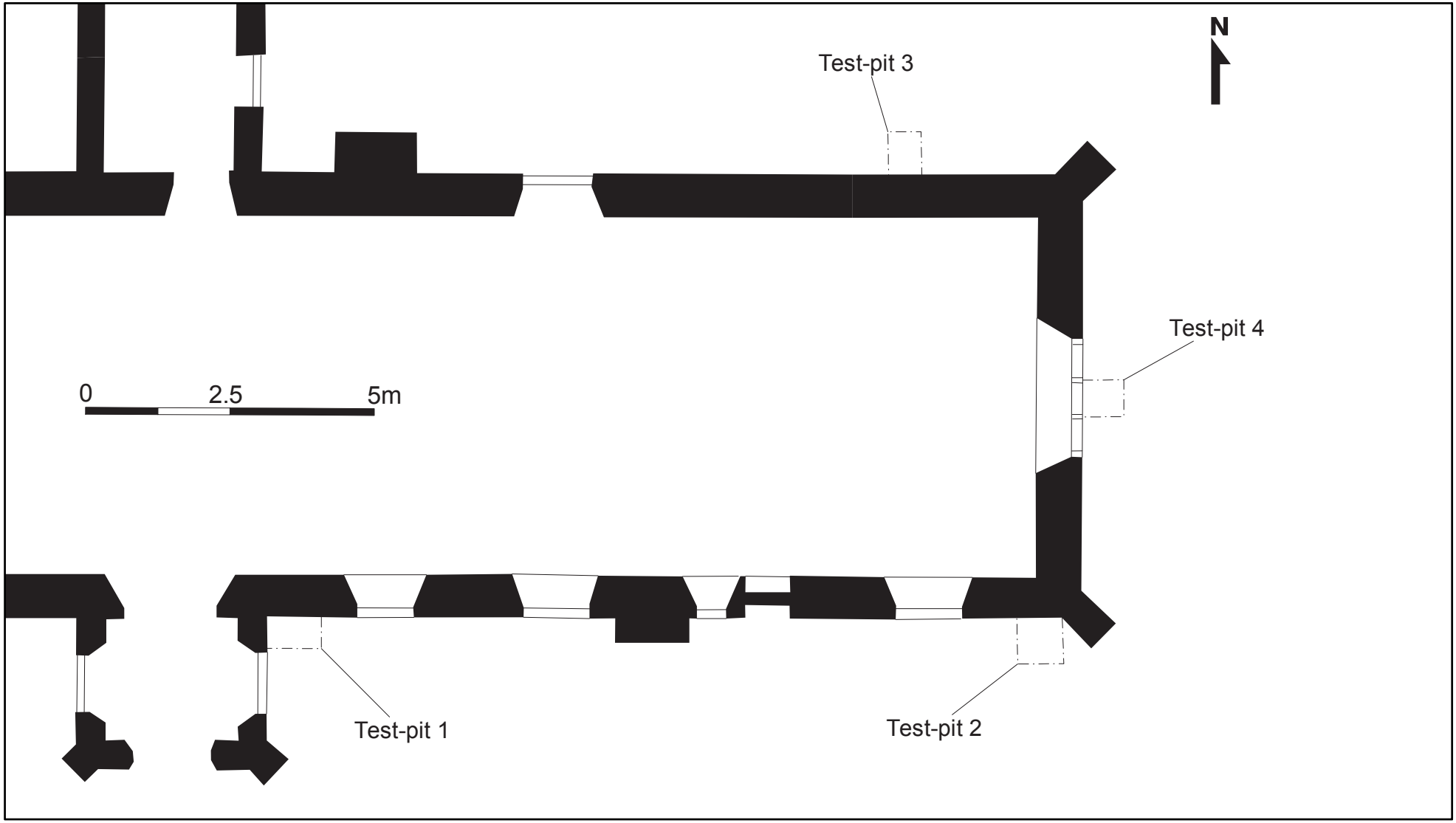

Figure 2. Location of Test-pits

5. Results

5.1 Introduction

Four test-pits were excavated; two on the south side of the church, one to the east and another to the north (Fig. 2).

5.2 Test-pit results

Test-pit 1: was excavated in the angle formed by the junction between the east wall of the south porch and the south wall of the nave. This pit was positioned to investigate the integrity of the below ground component of the extant drain in the angled corner formed by the two walls (Figs 2 and 3; Plates 1 and 2). At this juncture, the *c*.0.3m wide band of hard cementitious mortar, which runs the entire length of the wall base, extended to a depth of only 4cm below the existing ground level.

Below this, the face of the wall was covered with a gravel rich lime render for *c*.0.46m, giving way to a further *c*.0.28m of bonded fabric down to the wall base at a depth of 0.8m below the existing ground surface. The gravel rich render exhibited a smooth vertical face and was in a perfect unweathered condition. This almost certainly was the same layer as seen above ground at this juncture where weathering had removed the outer surface to leave an uneven face with the gravel inclusions more pronounced.

The base of the wall appeared to be horizontal at this juncture, but within the confines of such a limited intervention this could not be ascertained for certain. While it was unclear if there was an excavated footing below the base of the bonded wall, it was clear that the level of the wall base was also that of the surface of the naturally occurring subsoil which comprised orange sand with frequent gravel inclusions. A possible grave cut was seen in the base of the trench cutting into the natural sand and gravel. The wall fabric comprised predominantly of poorly coursed flint pebbles and cobbles, mostly rounded, set in a cream-coloured lime mortar.

The excavated overburden comprised greyish silty loam grading down to an orange/brown silty sand with a few inclusions of flints, roof tile, mortar, limestone fragments and very occasional small pieces of human skeletal material. There was no evidence to suggest that the drain base or its associated ceramic pipe was leaking.

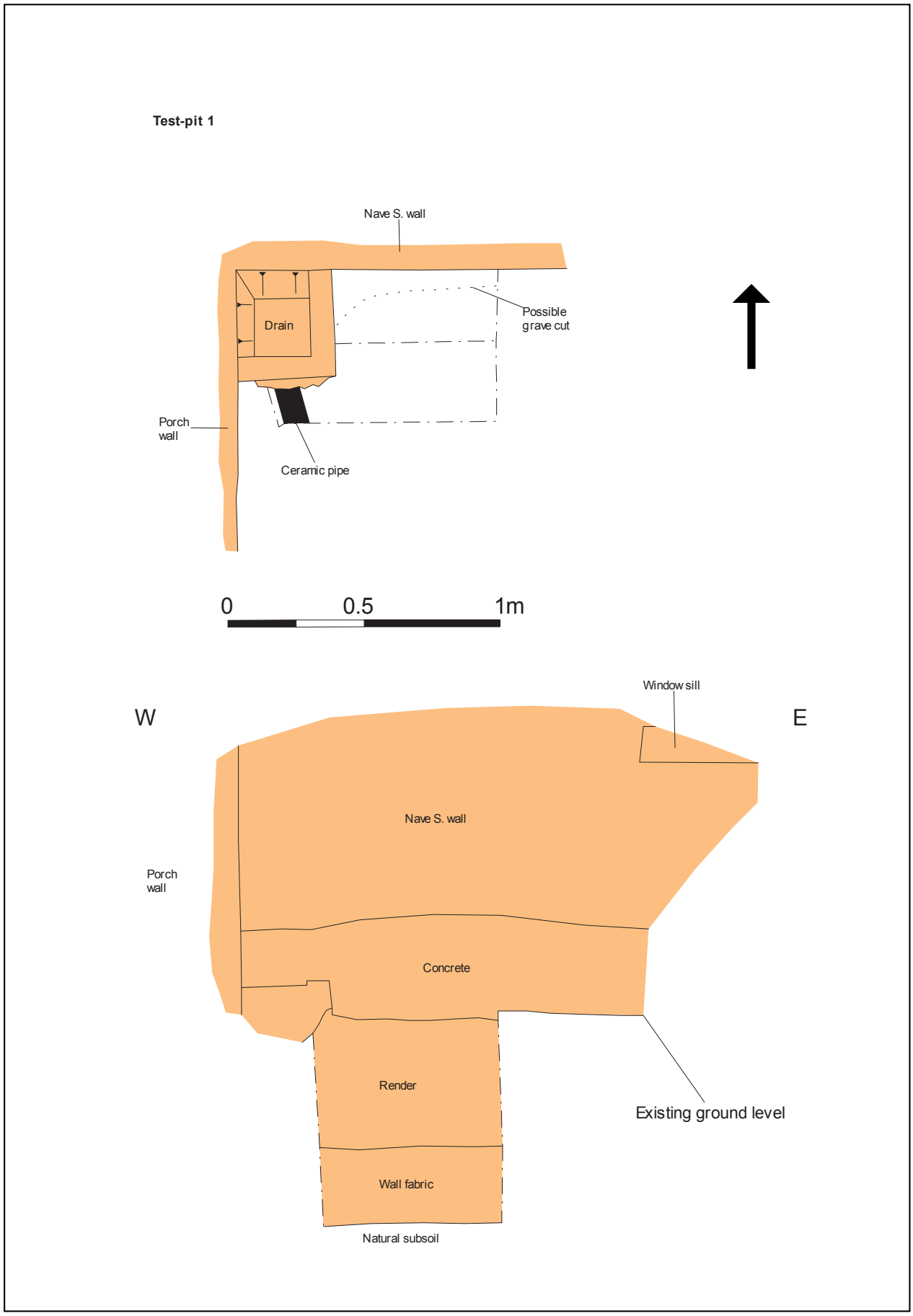

Figure 3. Test-pit 1; plan and section

Plate 1. Test-pit 1

Plate 2. Test-pit 1

Test-pit 2: was excavated in the shallow angle formed between the eastern end of the chancel south wall and the adjacent south-east corner diagonal buttress. Similarly to Test-pit 1, this pit was positioned to investigate the integrity of the below ground component of the extant drain in the angled corner formed by the two walls (Figs 2 and 4; Plates 3 and 4). At this juncture, the *c*.0.3m wide band of hard cementitious mortar, which runs the entire length of the wall base, extended to a depth of 10cm below the existing ground level.

Below this, there was a small remnant of gravel rich lime mortar render on the face of the wall which, itself, continued down for a further 0.46m to its base which again equated to the level of the naturally occurring subsoil, here, comprising orange sand.

Again, the base of the wall appeared to be horizontal within the confines of the limited excavation and the presence or absence of an underlying footing below the base of the bonded wall was not ascertained. Another possible grave cut was seen in the base of the trench cutting into the natural sand.

The wall fabric here comprised predominantly of closely packed, mostly large, angular/blocky flints with one limestone piece set in a sandy dark cream-coloured lime mortar and exhibited a hint of coursing.

The excavated overburden comprised brown loam grading down to brown silty sand with occasional inclusions of lime mortar and brick/tile fragments.

Again, there was no evidence to suggest that the drain base or its associated plastic pipe was leaking.

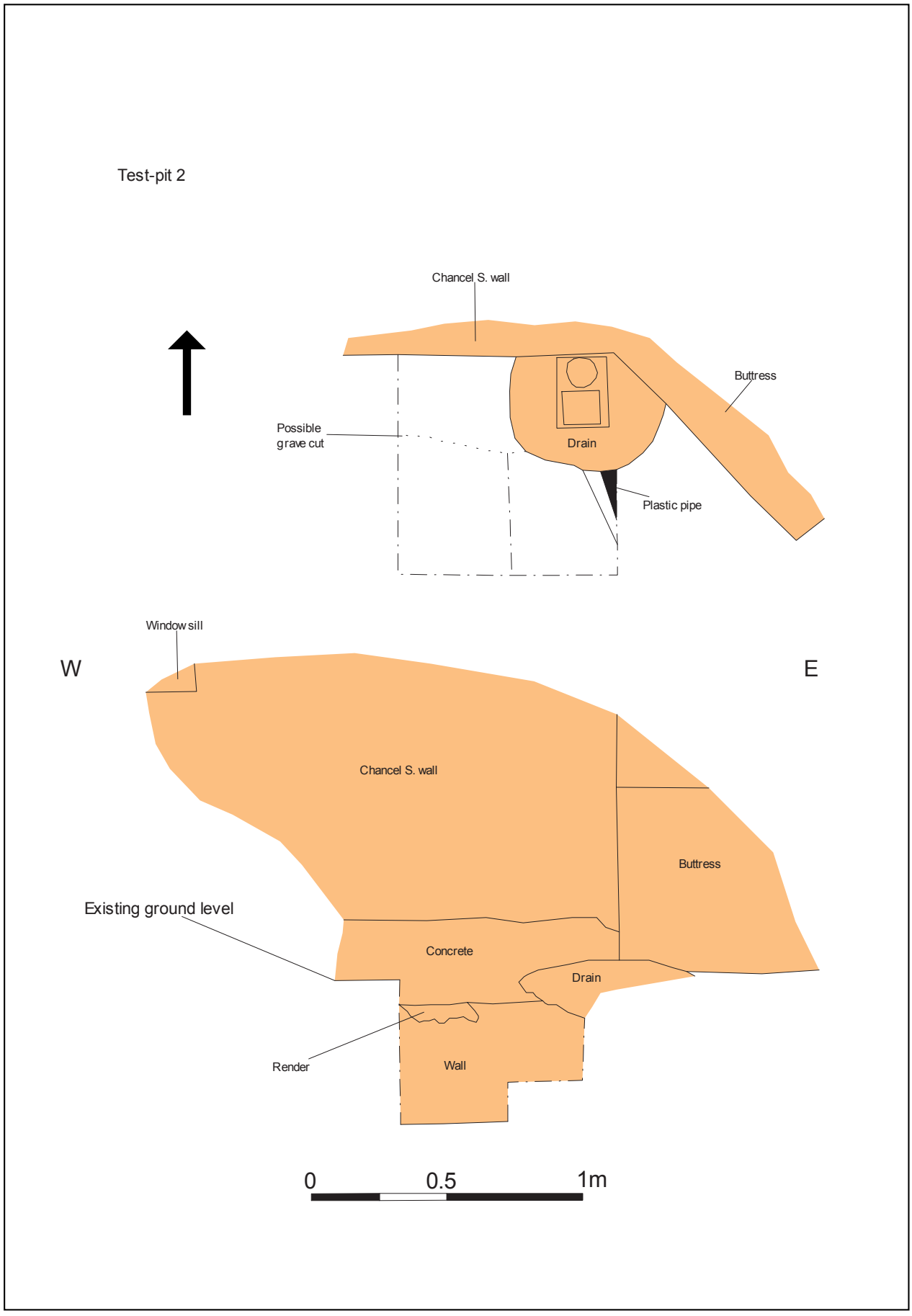

Figure 4. Test-pit 2; plan and section

Plate 3. Test-pit 2

Plate 4. Test-pit 2

Test-pit 3: was excavated against the northern wall of the chancel approximately 2.5m from its eastern end (Figs 2 and 5; Plates 5 and 6). The north wall did not have the same strip of hard cementitious render at its base, but did have a stepped feature running for its entire length, the surface of which appeared to be similar in character to the render strip on the south side of the church.

Excavation revealed that the vertical face of the feature continued down for approximately 0.3m below the present ground surface and was found to be sitting directly on subsoil. Removal of the subsoil directly below the feature revealed the face of the chancel wall *c*.0.2m back. The wall face was again covered in a well preserved gravel rich render layer which continued down to 0.64m below existing ground level with the, apparently horizontal, base of the wall a further 0.26m down, again equating to the level of the naturally occurring orange sand subsoil. The presence of a lower footing was not ascertained.

The wall fabric here comprised predominantly of closely packed flints with a hint of coursing.

The excavated overburden comprised 0.36m of dark brown loam over 0.55m of orange/brown silty sand; both layers contained frequent flint cobbles.

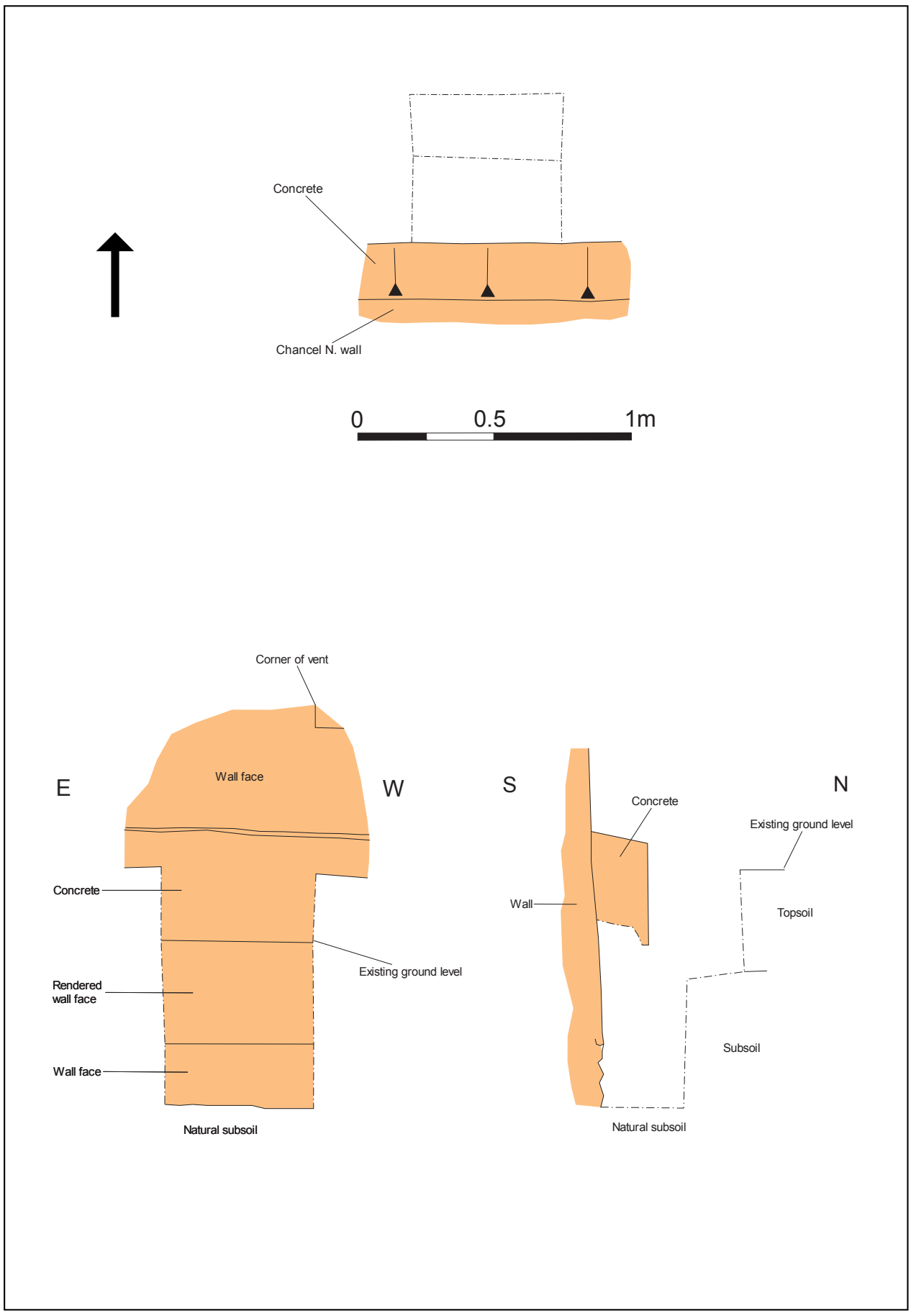

Figure 5. Test-pit 3; plan and sections

Plate 5. Test-pit 3

Plate 6. Test-pit 3

Test-pit 4: was excavated central to the face of the east wall of the chancel end within a flowerbed (Figs 2 and 6; Plates 7 and 8).

At approximately 0.2m below the existing ground level the wall face exhibited a similar layer of gravelly render to that seen in the other trenches, continuing down to a depth of 0.80m. The bonded wall fabric continued on down for a further 0.40m, to a total depth of 1.20m below the present ground surface. The fabric here comprised relatively uniformly sized large rounded flint pebbles/small cobbles set in a rather loosely aggregated dark cream-coloured lime mortar. The presence or absence of a lower footing was not ascertained.

The excavated overburden at this juncture comprised a dark grey/brown loam in the flowerbed, which graded into a less organic loam (all shown as one layer on Fig. 6), the whole with a combined maximum depth of 0.5 against the wall face itself. Below the topsoil was a c.0.60m thick brown silty sand layer which exhibited some stratification and included fragments of tile/brick, mortar and a few sherds of medieval coarseware pottery.

Again, the level of the naturally occurring orange sand subsoil also marked the base of the solid bonded wall.

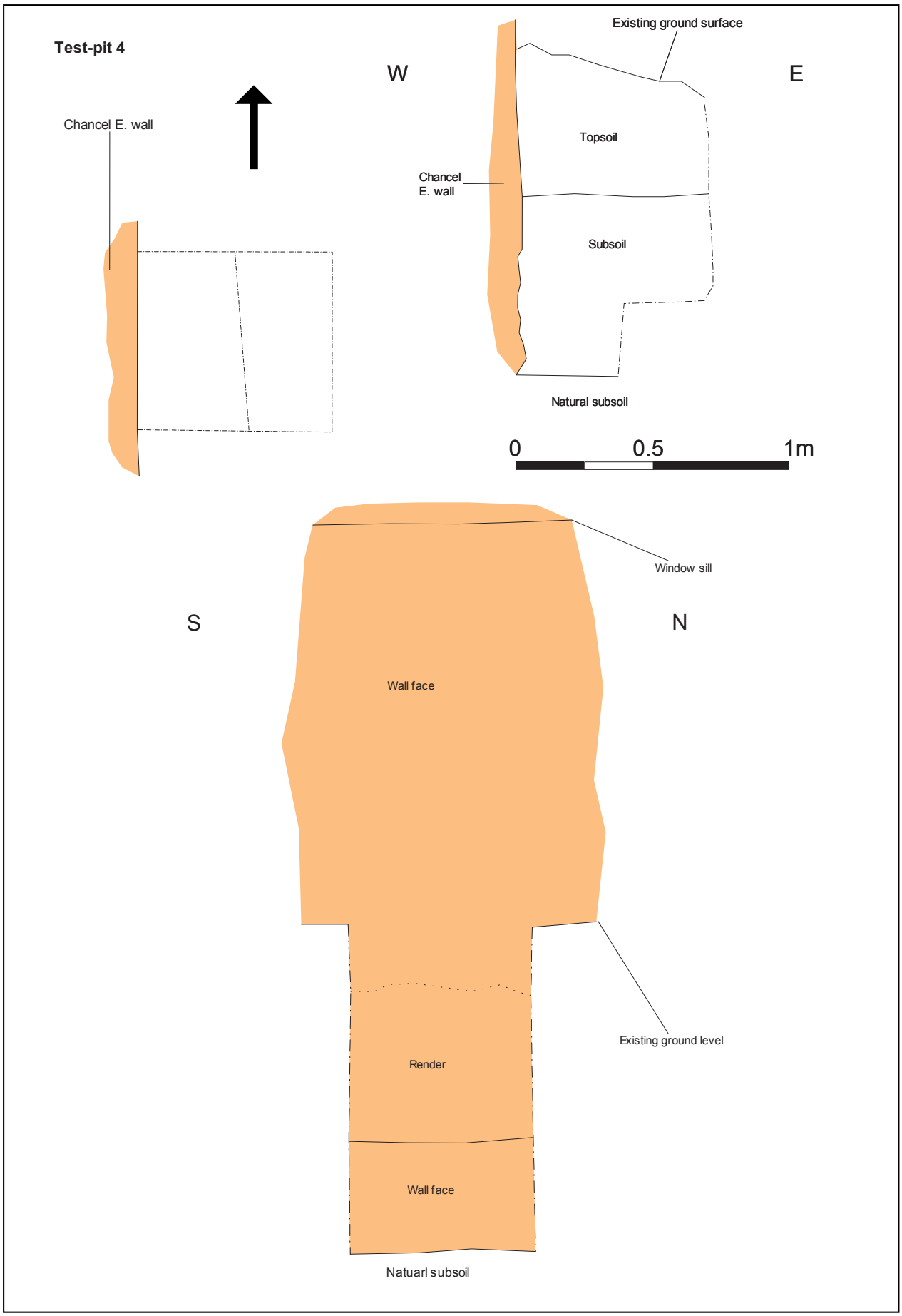

Figure 6. Test-pit 4; plan and sections

Plate 7. Test-pit 4

Plate 8. Test-pit 4

6. Discussion and conclusions

There was no evidence in the trenches that the extant drains were leaking and causing the water ingress related damp problems in the church.

The base of the wall was successfully located in all four of the excavated trenches. The level of the wall base clearly varied along the length of the nave and chancel with that in Test-pit 1 to the west *c*.0.55m lower than that seen in Test-pit 2 to the east. In all instances the base level of the wall equated to the level of the surface of the underlying drift geology, here consisting of glaciofluvial sands and gravels. Essentially, the base of the wall was constructed reflecting the natural topography of the site with its marked slope down from east to west, although within the limited extent of the test-pits, the wall base appeared to be horizontal. While the evidence is not completely incontrovertible this does suggest that the footing maybe stepped rather than sloping up gently for its entire length. If this were the case, then the most likely location for at least one step would be the junction between nave and chancel.

From an archaeological point of view, one of the most interesting features recorded in the test-pits was the presence of the gravelly render layer continuing to some depth below ground. A layer of heavily weathered gravelly render recorded on both the north and south nave/chancel walls above ground was considered to be an early feature, possibly even contemporary with the earliest surviving wall fabric that may be as early as 12th century in date. The good condition of the below ground surface gives an indication of how the wall faces of the whole church would once have looked. Clearly, the original trowelled face would have been completely smooth, despite the high gravel content. It is unusual for such a rendered face to be covered up in this way to such a depth which suggests that the level of the churchyard has raised quite significantly, probably mainly due to bulking up caused by the repeated excavation of graves. The very good condition of the render face also suggests that it was covered relatively soon after its application.

The fabric of the wall base was relatively uniform throughout, comprising generally of tightly packed flints with only a hint of coursing, a characteristic which continued into the earliest above ground fabric. This could be consistent with the purported 12th century foundation date of the church. By this time the clearly defined coursework seen in 11th

century Norman structures had become less pronounced, but not completely irregular, a characteristic which often defines later medieval wall fabrics. However, the possibly contemporary window and priests door in the south wall are more suggestive of a 14th century date, although there is at least some evidence that these had at least partially been re-set and could even be later insertions into the earlier, 12th century, wall fabric (Boulter 2009).

7. Archive deposition

The report will be deposited with the Suffolk HER along with the digital photographs and paper archive (drawings etc.). A digital version of the report has been uploaded to the Oasis online archaeological database.

8. Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by Steve Manthorpe and Stuart Boulter.

Project management was undertaken by Stuart Boulter.

The report and its illustrations were created by Stuart Boulter and the report was copyedited by Rhodri Gardner.

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Suffolk Archaeology CIC
Unit 5 | Plot 11 | Maitland Road | Lion Barn Industrial Estate
Needham Market | Suffolk | IP6 8NZ
Rhodri.Gardner@suffolkarchaeology.co.uk

01449 900120
www.suffolkarchaeology.co.uk