

Report on Archaeological Monitoring
St Mary's Church, Forncett St Mary, Norfolk

NHER ENF 135133

Prepared for Forncett PCC

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Project name	St Mary's Church
Parish	Forncett
District	South Norfolk
Grid reference	TM 1662 9383
NHER Ref.	ENF 135133
Date of fieldwork	15th-17th December 2014 and 9th February 2015

Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out during the installation of a new drainage system at St Mary's Church, Forncett St Mary. The flint footings of the church were exposed in several areas and, at the east side of the porch, a substantial mortared flint footing was recorded. A dump of mortar seen in a trench near the vestry was undated but represented building work at the church.

Two sherds of 12th to 14th-century pottery and a piece of sandstone which may be worked were found in one trench.

1.0 Introduction

St Mary's Church is situated on the east side of Forncett St Mary which is approximately mid-way between Norwich and Diss in South Norfolk (TM 1662 9383), (Fig. 1).

Building and rainwater drainage improvements were being undertaken at the church by Nicholas Warns Architect Ltd for Forncett PCC. The work included installing drains around the nave, chancel, north porch and south-east vestry. Archaeological work involved monitoring of all groundworks associated with the new drains (Fig. 2). This work accorded to a project design prepared by Sarah Bates to meet the requirements of a monitoring brief set by Norfolk Historic Environment Service (NHES Generic Brief for the Monitoring of Works under Archaeological Supervision and Control). Drainage works included the digging of new drainage gullies beneath downpipes and, from these, drains running to ditches at the edges of the churchyard. Two catchpits below the church tower and a soakaway in the churchyard, all of which were originally proposed at the church (see Bates 2014), were not installed due to a change in the design of the drainage scheme.

Forncett PCC funded the repairs, improvements and archaeological work.

The archaeological archive will, on completion of the project, be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards. An Oasis form is included below as Appendix 1.

2.0 Geology and topography

The site is located within the area of South Norfolk Claylands and soils, generally sandy loams, are derived from clay, silt, sand and gravel formed during the Quaternary Period. During the medieval period extensive areas of arable occurred here (Williamson 2005, British Geological Survey © NERC 2015). The underlying solid geology in the area of the site is chalk.

St Mary's Church is set to the east of Aslacton Road at a height of just above 25m OD (OS bench mark on west tower 25.37m) and overlooks the Tas River which is about 200m to its east.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The church is situated on the east side of the village at the centre of the original 'Fornsetta', one of the four settlements mentioned in Domesday Book as comprising the manor of Forncett. Two churches are recorded at Forncett in Domesday Book (1086) (probably those of St Mary and St Peter – the latter about a kilometre to the south of St Mary's). Parts of the present nave of St Mary's Church date to the 11th or 12th century. A report held in the NHER (Vivat Trust 2001) suggests that the nave was extended westwards, probably during the 14th century, and that the original south doorway was in the position of the present south-west window. Other parts of the nave, and the tower, date to the 15th century and the porch is probably of 16th-century date. During the medieval period St Mary's was of greater importance than St Peter's but by the 18th century St Peter's had become more important and a new rectory was built there. In the later 19th century the St Mary's chancel was demolished and rebuilt along with the south vestry. A lancet of likely 13th century-date seen today in the north wall of the chancel may have been reset there.

The church was recorded in 1979 as partly derelict (Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER)) and was closed in 1981 with many of its internal furnishings subsequently removed. Within the last few years restoration has occurred as part of a community project and finds of Middle and Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval pottery and post-medieval tile have been recovered from the area of the churchyard.

A search of the NHER within a 500m radius of the church shows that in several areas to the west and north-west of the church metal detecting has taken place and has led to the recovery of Bronze Age metalwork, a 1st-century AD coin hoard and other finds including Early and Middle Saxon and medieval and post-medieval coins and other metalwork. Pottery of Iron Age, Roman Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date has also been found. To the south-east of the church, on the other side of the river, Roman coins and a steelyard weight, Roman pottery, and metal finds of medieval and later date have been found.

Just to the north-west of the church the site of a medieval manor house is marked on a post-medieval map and further to the north-west earthworks of medieval and post-

medieval date represent a hollow way, enclosures and probable clay pits. Medieval pottery sherds have also been found.

Early post-medieval timber-framed, clay lump and other post-medieval buildings, some thatched, occur within the area of the village.

4.0 Methodology

Archaeological monitoring aimed to observe and record the presence or absence, location, nature and date of any surviving archaeological deposits within the areas affected by the drainage works.

Most of the archaeological monitoring work was undertaken in December 2014 but, due to the presence of scaffolding, that around the south doorway took place in February 2015.

The trenches were dug, mostly by mini-digger with some hand-digging, by the site contractors (Plate 1).

The location of the drains and gully trenches was recorded; where relevant, gully trenches were assigned a context number for ease of recording. Otherwise, archaeological features and deposits were recorded using pro forma context sheets in the standard way. Digital and black and white film photographs recorded the archaeological deposits and the work at the site generally.

Finds of archaeological significance were retrieved.

No deposits required sampling for environmental assessment.

5.0 Results (Figs. 2 and 3)

(Context numbers are shown in square brackets and listed in Appendix 2. Context numbers allocated as trench numbers were also used for unstratified finds from those trenches).

Gully trench [1] (Figs 2 and 3a, Plate 2)

This downpipe gully was at the corner formed by the north nave wall and east wall of the porch. Its eastern side was occupied by a modern drain set in an existing concrete gully. In the west side of the trench and beneath the wall of the porch a solid flint mortar footing was recorded [2]. It consisted of flints (all sizes) in a cream lime mortar. It extended about 0.20m east from the face of the porch wall above it and a metre north from the nave wall. Its maximum observed depth was 0.40m. The footing might have related to the porch or, perhaps, to an earlier part of the church.

Gully trench [3] (Fig. 2) (Plate 3)

Gully [3] was located towards the east end of the north wall of the nave. It was not dug to its full size in the presence of the archaeologist. The flint footing of the church wall was exposed and was flush with the wall above it. The footing comprised medium and large flints and some mortar and extended about 0.40m below ground level. Sandy loam soil and flints were removed from the gully trench. The flints extended about 0.30m north from the nave wall but were loose and of no archaeological significance.

Gully trench [4] (Figs 2 and 3b, Plate 4)

Trench [4] was located towards the east end of the south wall of the nave. The excavated area observed was 0.60 x 0.30m and the trench was dug against the church to a depth of 0.60m exposing the wall footing and, in the bottom of the trench, dark red-flecked light brown firm silty sand which was not excavated. The wall footing consisted of light brown silty sand with frequent medium and large flints [7] overlaid by orange brown quite soft and loose silty sand with occasional small flints and grit [6] and large flints in some brown silty sand [5]. Two sherds of 12th-14th-century pottery were found; one in deposit [7] and the other unstratified in the soil removed from the trench, and two joining fragments of sandstone from deposit [7] were probably worked but are undateable.

Gully trench [9] (Fig. 2) (Plate 5)

Trench [9] was positioned below the nave wall just to the east of the south doorway. It was 1.10x 0.80m in size and 0.15m deep with a deeper area (0.75m) for the gully pot. The trench was dug to its full depth within slightly orangey brown quite loose sandy silt with occasional small flints. The upper part of the wall footing was exposed and consisted of rough flints which protruded very slightly south from the face of the wall above. Nothing of archaeological interest was seen.

Not monitored

Gully trenches at the north side of the chancel and south-west corner of the porch were not monitored by the archaeologist. These areas were occupied by an existing gullies and drains and although they were to be replaced it was considered highly unlikely that anything of significance would survive there.

Drains (Fig. 2) (Plates 4 - 6)

The trenches from all the downpipe gullies ran into two drain runs which ran, due east and south, to drain into ditches at the churchyard boundaries; one at the east side of the churchyard and the other at the south boundary. They were 0.30-0.40m wide and ranged from 0.30-0.90m in depth (being shallower close to the church). The drain running east across the churchyard was up to 0.60m deep and that running to the south was up to 0.90m deep (Plates 6 and 7). Where they extended below the brown sandy loam topsoil they cut into the slightly sandier underlying churchyard soils.

The only area where a deposit of slight interest was seen was just to the south-west of the vestry. Here, a layer of cream mortar was noted in the bottom of the drain at a depth of 0.75m [10] (Plate 8). It extended 1.20m along the trench and was up to 0.10m thick

but was undated. It represented dumped building debris and probably related to a phase of the church's construction or demolition.

6.0 The finds (Appendix 00)

by Sue Anderson

Introduction

Finds were recovered from the contractor's trench [4] and a footing [7], and comprised two sherds of pottery (6g) and two pieces of stone (1106g).

Pottery

Two body sherds of medieval coarseware were recovered from contexts [4] and [7]. Both were in fine sandy fabrics comparable with Norwich-type LMU, and probably of 12th–14th-century date.

Stone building material

Two joining fragments of a block of coarse sandstone were recovered from footing [7]. The piece has one right-angled corner and the upper and lower surfaces are flat. The sides measure 100 x 126mm long and the piece is 70mm thick. Although the fragment appears to be roughly worked, there are no tooling marks visible on any of the surfaces and it is intrinsically undateable.

7.0 Conclusions

A solid flint and mortar footing recorded at the east side of the porch may have related to its construction but only extended about a third of the way along the side of the porch and might be rather substantial for the small structure. It is possible that it related to an earlier part of the building. There is a suggestion (see above; Archaeological and Historical Background) that the nave was originally shorter at its west end and that an original south door was in the position of the existing south-west window. If this was the case, it might be possible that the flint and mortar footing could relate to the original west end of the nave.

The footings of the existing church were exposed at both sides of the nave. They comprised flints mostly without mortar, and silty sand deposits. The footings did not extend out from the church wall and were less substantial than that seen next to the porch.

A layer of sandy lime mortar (undated) was seen in the drain to the south-west of the vestry and represented a dump of building or demolition waste.

Two sherds of 12th-14th century pottery and two fragments of sandstone, which may have been used in the church footings, were the only finds from the site.

Nothing else of archaeological significance was found.

Acknowledgements

The archaeological work was commissioned and funded by Forncett PCC. The drainage works were undertaken by Steve Miles and staff. The advice of Nicholas Warns (architect) is gratefully acknowledged.

Archaeological monitoring and recording was by Sarah Bates, Heather Wallis prepared the Figures included in this report. The finds were examined and reported on by Sue Anderson.

References:

Bates, S, 2014	Project Design for Monitoring of Works Under Archaeological Supervision and Control, Prepared on behalf of Forncett PCC and Nicholas Warns Architect Ltd
British Geological Survey 2015	http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html
Vivat Trust 2001	The Church of St Mary, Forncett St Mary, Norfolk, Unpublished report forming part of a feasibility study, (NHER)
Williamson, T., 2005	'Soil Landscapes' in Ashwin, T. and Davison, A. <i>An Historical Atlas of Norfolk</i> (Third Edition)

Appendix 1

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

[List of Projects](#) | [Manage Projects](#) | [Search Projects](#) | [New project](#) | [Change your details](#) | [HER coverage](#) | [Change country](#) | [Log out](#)

Printable version

OASIS ID: sarahbat1-199564

Project details

Project name	St Mary's Church, Forncett St Mary
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring of drainage works in churchyard; part of a solid flint and mortar footing recorded at east side of porch, may relate to porch, or possibly earlier. Other church footings were recorded below nave walls but of little additional significance. A deposit of mortar seen in the drain dug to S of vestry represented a dump of waste material. Two sherds of 12th to 14th-century pottery found.
Project dates	Start: 15-12-2014 End: 09-02-2015
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	135133 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	FOUNDATION Medieval
Monument type	FOUNDATION Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Medieval
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

Project location

Country	England
Site location	NORFOLK SOUTH NORFOLK FORNCETT St Mary's Church
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	TM 1662 9383 52.4987812031 1.19173244787 52 29 55 N 001 11 30 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Sarah Bates
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Sarah Bates
Project director/manager	Sarah Bates

Project supervisor Sarah Bates
Type of sponsor/funding body PCC
Name of sponsor/funding body Forncett PCC

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Norfolk Museum and Archaeology Service
Physical Contents "Ceramics"
Digital Archive recipient Norfolk Museum and Archaeology Service
Digital Contents "Stratigraphic"
Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography"
Paper Archive recipient Norfolk Museum and Archaeology Service
Paper Contents "Ceramics", "Stratigraphic", "Survey"
Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Miscellaneous Material", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section"

Project bibliography 1

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OASIS:

Appendix 2: List of contexts

ENF	Context	Type	Area	Category	Description
135133	1	Trench	N	Contractors trench	downpipe gully N of nave E of porch
135133	2	Masonry	1	Footing	footing E of N porch
135133	3	Trench	N	Contractors trench	downpipe gully N of nave
135133	4	Trench	S	Contractors trench	downpipe gully S of nave
135133	5	Masonry	4	Footing	nave footing
135133	6	layer	4	Footing	nave footing
135133	7	Deposit		Footing	?footing
135133	8	Deposit		Layer	topsoil
135133	9	Trench	S	Contractors trench	downpipe gully E of S door
135133	10	Deposit	S	Layer	mortar dump

Appendix 3: The finds

Context	Category	Quantity	Weight (g)	Period
4	pottery	1	3	Medieval
7	pottery	1	3	Medieval
7	building material	2	1106	

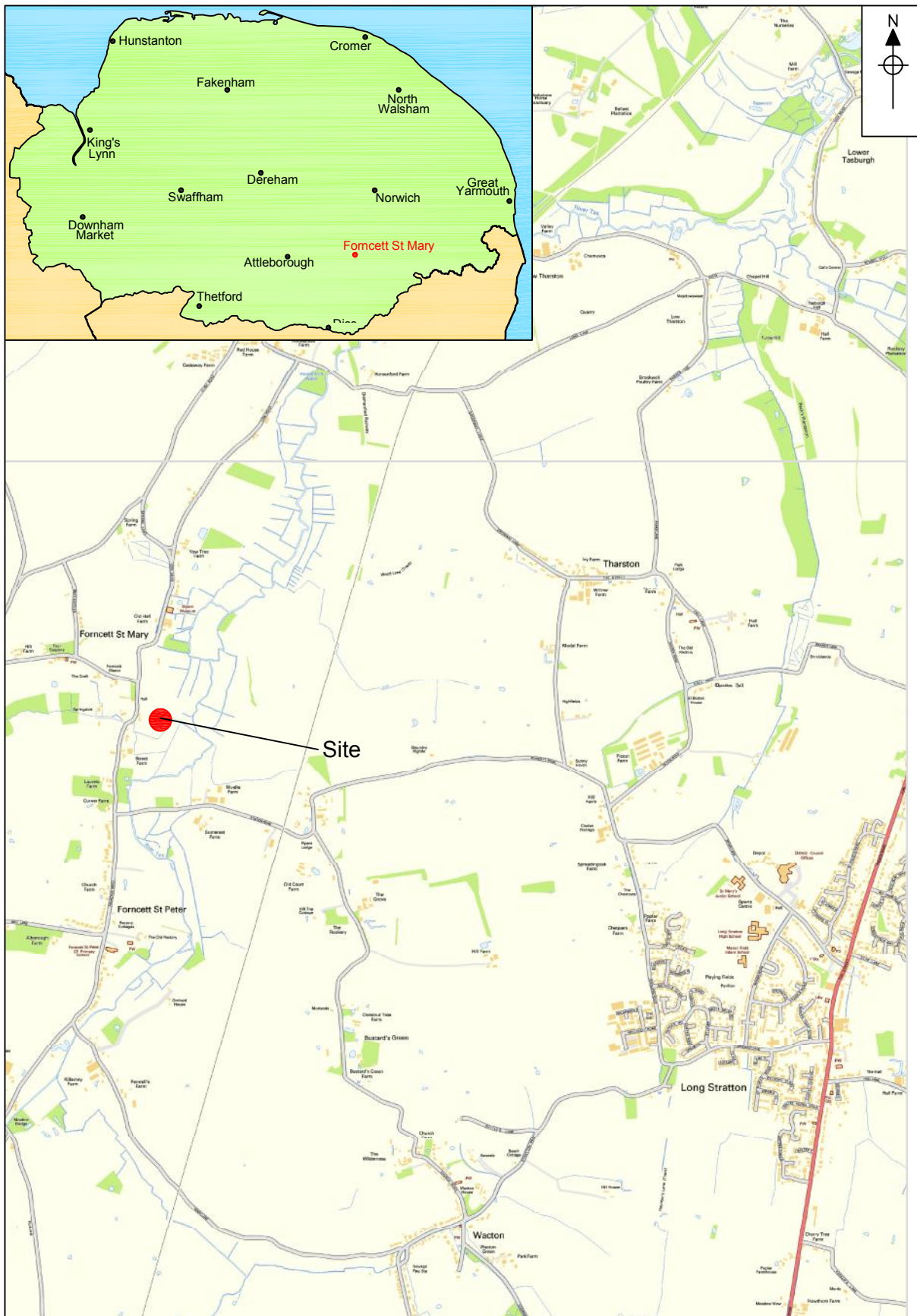


Figure 1. Site Location.

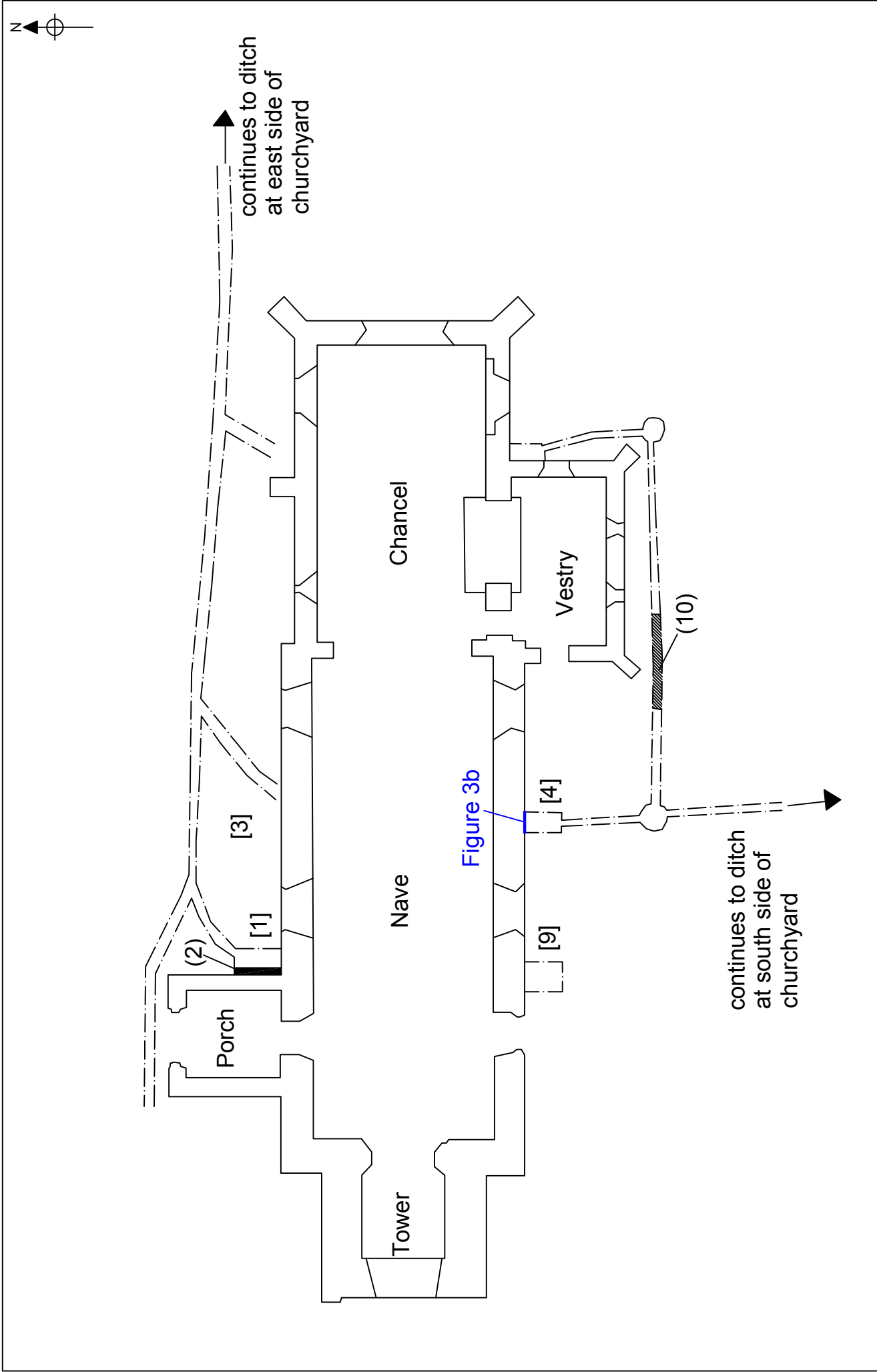


Figure 2. Plan showing location of trenches. Scale 1:150.

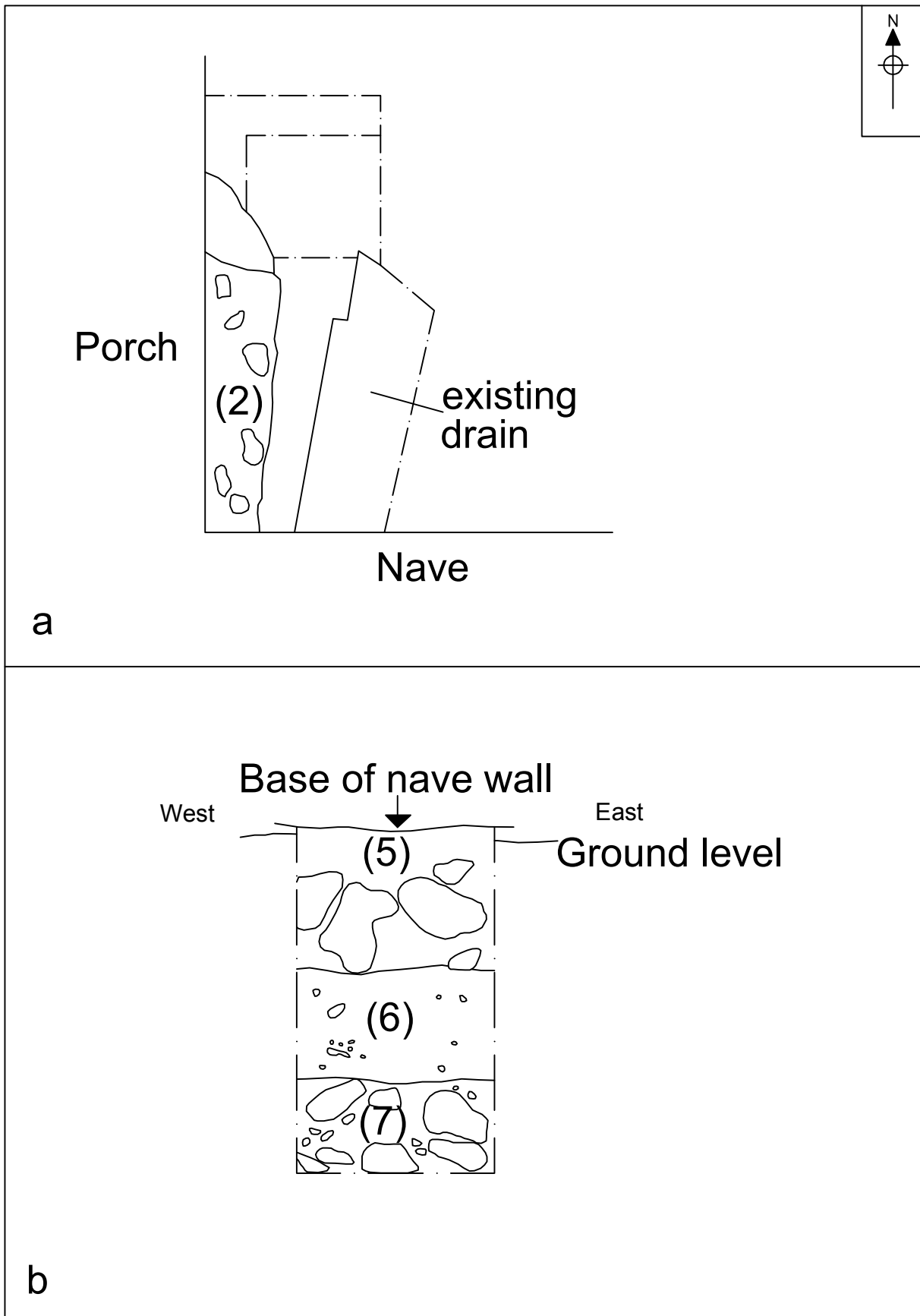


Figure 3. a: Plan of Trench [1] showing footing (2). Scale 1:20.

b: Section through church footing in Trench [4]. Scale 1:10.



Plate 1: Drain trench N of church, looking E



Plate 2: Trench [1], footing [2], looking S, 0.5m scale



Plate 3: Trench [3], nave wall footing, looking SW, 0.5m scale



Plate 4: Church footing in trench [4], looking N, 0.5m scale



Plate 5: Trench [9] showing base of nave wall, looking N, 0.5m scale



Plate 6: Drain E of church, looking W, 1m scale



Plate 7: Drain S of church, looking N, 1m scale



Plate 8: Drain S of vestry, deposit [10], looking E,
0.5m scale