



Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1083

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at SS Peter and Paul's
Church, Fakenham, Norfolk**

7123 FAK

Michael J Boyle

June 2005

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Location: SS Peter and Paul's Church Fakenham
District: North Norfolk
Grid Ref: TF 9191 2977
HER No.: 7123 FAK
Date of fieldwork: 6th to 8th June 2005

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken to monitor the excavation of a single service trench adjacent to the west tower of SS Peter and Paul's church Fakenham, Norfolk. During the works a partial profile of the flint and mortar foundation of the tower was revealed. A garden or churchyard soil deposit to the south of the tower contained one possible in situ east-to-west aligned burial and a small quantity of disarticulated human bone.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) in order to monitor exterior drainage works at SS Peter and Paul's Church Fakenham, Norfolk.

The drainage works consisted of a north-to-south aligned trench 15.8m long (9.88 sq. m) located immediately to the west of the west tower of the church. Most of the trench was narrow and shallow (12.5m long x 0.5m wide x 0.32-0.50m deep), with a shorter, wider deeper section (3.3m long x 1.1m wide x c. 3.75m deep) at the southern end.

The work was commissioned by Mathew Thomas Dip Arch MA (Cons) RIBA on behalf of Fakenham Parish Church Council. May Gurney were contracted to carry out the work.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: EJR/03/07/04). The Brief required that an archaeologist be in constant attendance at the site during works in order to record any surviving archaeological remains that may be uncovered.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The underlying solid geology at the site is white chalk of the Upper Cretaceous period (Wade-Martin 1994). This is overlain by a yellow glacial sand which extended to the base of the excavated trench (3.75m below the current ground surface). Overlying the sand was a mid brown fine sandy silt deposit which had a maximum depth of 0.60m and was interpreted as being a garden or churchyard soil. This deposit was sealed by a 0.12m layer of asphalt which acted as a surface for a car park.

The site was situated at a height of 43.19 OD (western face of south-western buttress of church tower) and displayed a gentle slope decreasing in height from

north to south by 0.54m over its 16m length. Due to the sandy nature of the site it was free draining.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

SS Peter and Paul's Church, Fakenham consists of a west tower, nave, north and south aisles, chancel, south porch and north vestry. Materials used in its construction were flint, limestone, ironbound conglomerate, brick and concrete.

Reused stonework within the fabric of the church indicates the remains of a Saxo-Norman building have been incorporated. The north door is Early English, re-set. The chancel is early 14th century, remodelled in the late 14th century when the nave and aisles were rebuilt. The nave south door may remain from the earlier period. The tower dates from the second half of the 15th century, as do the clerestory and south porch and font. The tower pinnacles were added in the 1820s and there was an overall restoration with new vestry and roofs in 1864, followed by further work on the tower (Rose 2003).

In February 2005 rearrangement works involved the removal of pews from the north aisle and the lifting of the floor. There was a central walkway beneath which were central heating pipes apparently bedded in sawdust. Under the new platform to the north, cement had been laid at the east end of a graveslab (John Pigge, surgeon 1755 and his relict Bridget) sometime during the 20th century. Other details of previous layouts of the interior of the church were also visible (Rose 2005).

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological evidence revealed during the excavation of a north-to-south aligned service trench located 0.5m to the west of the church's west tower. This trench joined the main sewer approximately 16m to the south.

The contractors used a J.C.B. digger with a toothed 0.5m wide bucket to excavate the northern 12.50m of the trench to a depth of approximately 0.5m. The southern 3.30m of the trench was excavated using a toothed 1.10m wide bucket to a maximum depth of 3.75m.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

A level was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark of 43.19m on the western face of the south-western buttress of the church tower.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

On site parking was available with easy access. The weather was cool and dry.

5.0 Results

(Figs 2a, 3, 4, 5 and 6)

Any archaeological remains which may have existed in the northern 2.0m portion of the trench had been destroyed by the excavation of modern service trenches for previous drainage work and a gas main. The backfill of these trenches consisted of a pale to mid brown silty sand containing fragments of red brick and chalk and mortar lumps ([01]).

To the south of this disturbance, and immediately below the asphalt surface (0.2m deep) of the site, the contractors encountered a hard flint and sandy chalk mortar deposit ([02]) which proved to be the foundation of the south-western buttress of the church tower (Figs 2a, 3 and 4). The contractors continued to excavate the 0.50m wide trench to a maximum depth of 0.32m through the foundation revealing part of its profile in section (Fig. 6). The northern and southern sides of the feature displayed a slope of approximately forty-five degrees suggesting a widening towards the base. The foundation had a maximum width of 3.60m.

To the south of the foundation a 0.50m wide trench continued to be excavated to an average depth of 0.50m for a further 7.50m. Below the asphalt surface in this area was a single deposit (0.64m deep) consisting of a fine mid brown sandy loam containing occasional lumps of chalk and angular flint pebbles ([03]). This deposit was interpreted as being a relatively undisturbed garden or churchyard soil.

At a distance of 10m from the northern end of the trench and at a depth of 0.45m the fragmented cranium of a human skull was located in the west facing section of the trench. A tentative investigation suggested that the fragments were *in situ* and that the top of the skull had been truncated by the machine bucket. A small quantity of disarticulated human bone was also recovered from this deposit ([03]) to the south of the skull fragments.

The southernmost 3.30m length of the trench was excavated to a depth of 3.75m and was increased in width to 1.10m. The area was heavily disturbed by several modern features including a trench for an electrical cable and construction trenches for a brick built drainage chamber and deep circular manhole used to inspect and maintain drains. It was, however, possible to identify the continuation of the garden or churchyard soil deposit ([03]) which these features had truncated and ascertain that it had a maximum depth of 0.64m. A small quantity of disarticulated human bone was also recovered in this area. This deposit directly overlay a medium grained pale yellow glacial sand. This natural deposit extended to the base of the excavated area, a depth of 3.75m below present ground surface.

6.0 The Finds

Finds from the site consisted of an *in situ* human skull and other disarticulated human bone ([02]). The presence of human skeletal remains within a well used churchyard was not unexpected, unfortunately no dating evidence was retrieved with this material.

7.0 Conclusions

The watching brief enabled a partial examination of the techniques used in the construction of the foundation of the church tower of SS Peter and Paul's church, Fakenham. The undressed flint cobbles appear to have been randomly yet fairly evenly spaced within a sandy chalk mortar. Although the base of the foundation was not encountered, the angled sides of the revealed upper portion confirm a widening towards the base, possibly to aid structural stability.

The absence of disarticulated human bone and the apparent undisturbed nature of the soil deposit encountered in the northernmost 10.0m length of the trench suggests that this area has not been used for burials. The apparently *in situ* human skull fragments located in the west facing section of the trench suggest an east-to-west aligned Christian burial, the skull being located to the west. No dating evidence associated with the burial was obtained. The remaining 6.0m length to the south of the skull fragments, however, produced enough disarticulated bone to confirm that burials had occurred here at least on a small scale.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mathew Thomas Dip Arch MA (Cons) RIBA who commissioned this work on behalf of Fakenham Parish Church Council.

The fieldwork was carried out by the author (NAU).

Thanks also to Jan Allen (NLA) for supplying the historic records.

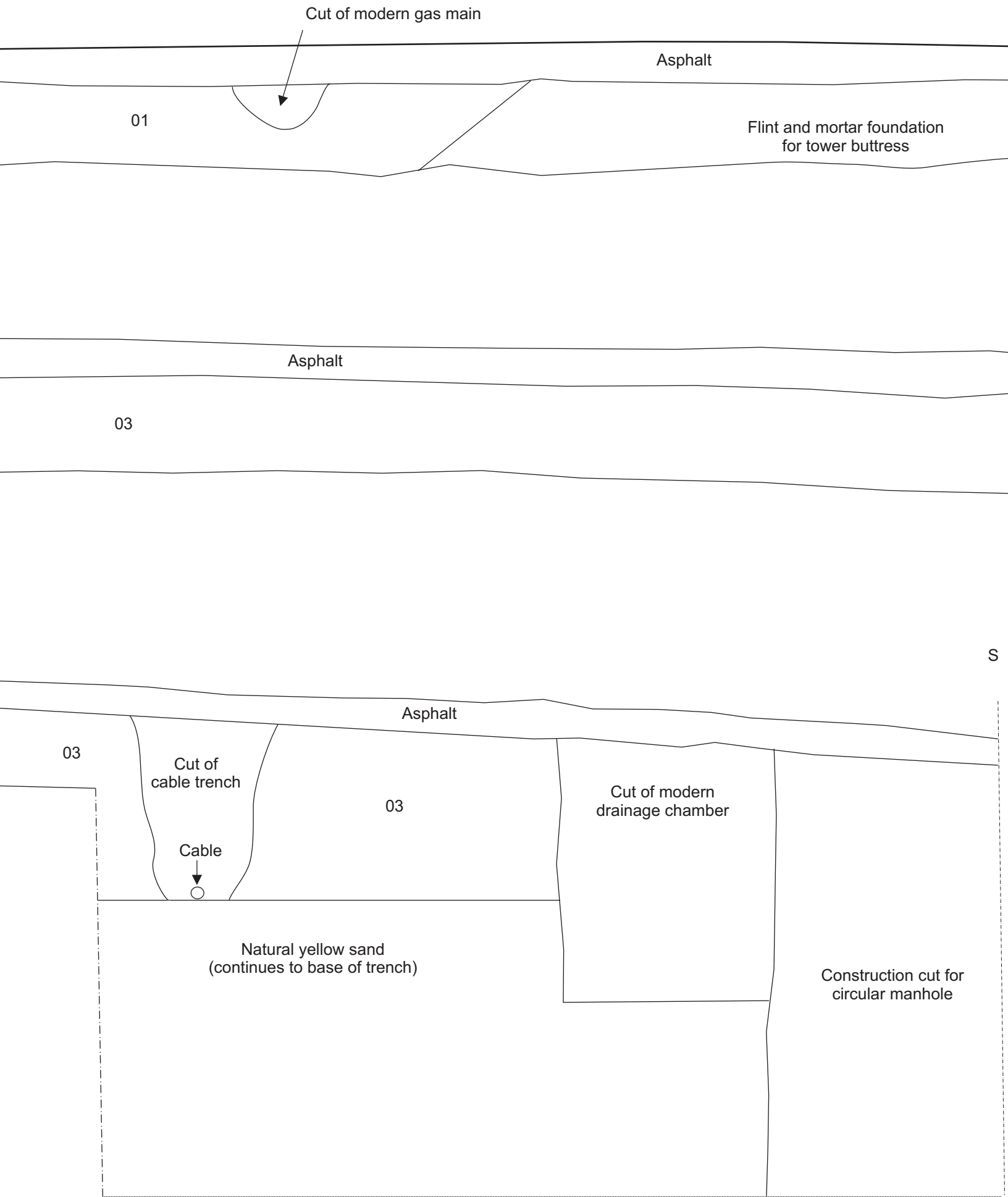
The report was illustrated and produced by Julie Curl (NAU), edited by Alice Lyons (NAU).

Bibliography

- Rose, E J., 2003 NHER 7123 FAK Unpublished Report
Rose, E J., 2005 NHER 7123 FAK Unpublished Report
Wade-Martins, P., 1994 *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, Norfolk Museums Service

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
01	Deposit	Pale to mid brown silty sand containing fragments of red brick and chalk and mortar lumps	Post-medieval
02	Deposit	A hard flint and sandy chalk mortar deposit	Medieval
03	Deposit	A fine mid brown sandy loam containing occasional lumps of chalk and angular flint pebbles	Post-Medieval



Cut of modern gas main

Asphalt

01

Flint and mortar foundation
for tower buttress

Asphalt

03

S

Asphalt

03

Cut of
cable trench

03

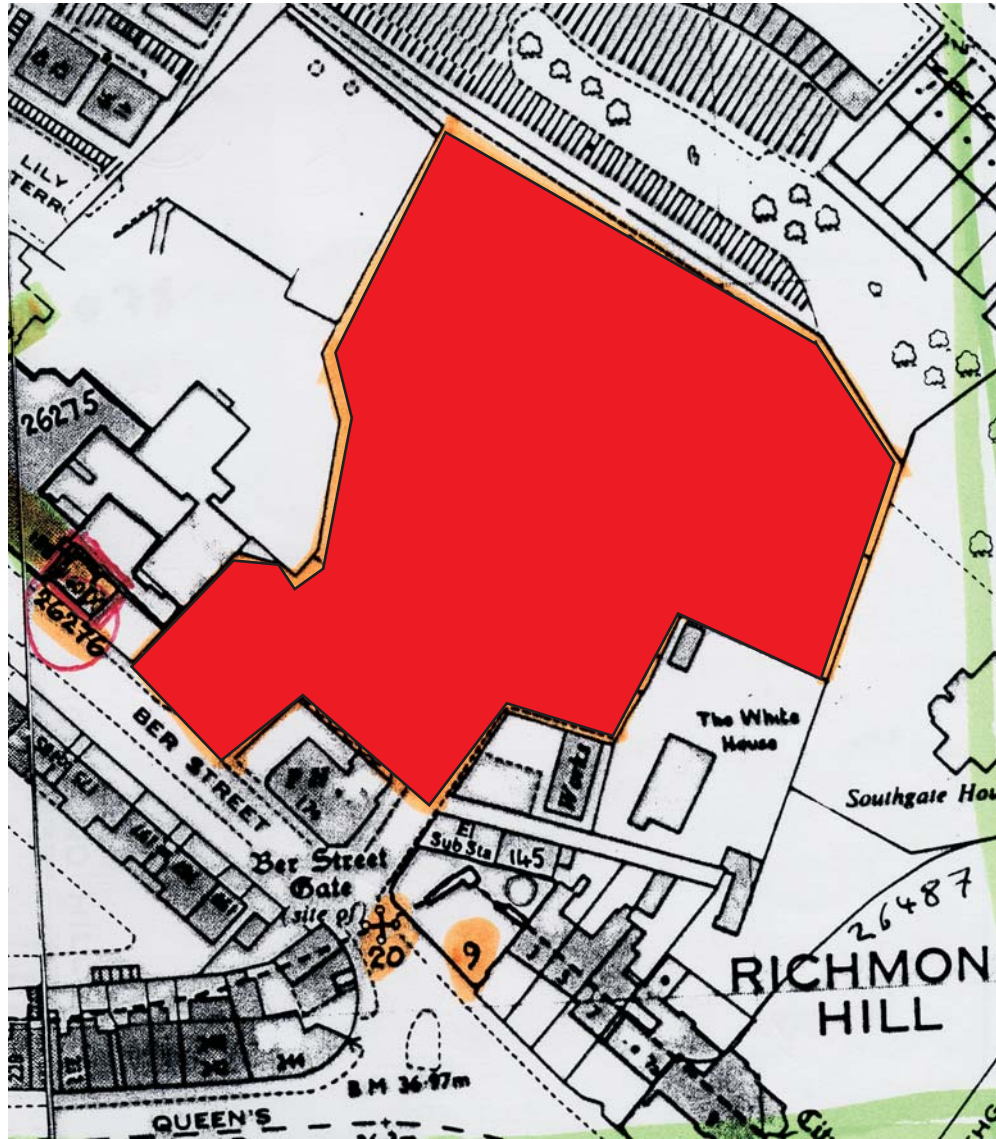
Cut of modern
drainage chamber

Cable

Natural yellow sand
(continues to base of trench)

Construction cut for
circular manhole

Base of trench 3.75m below string level



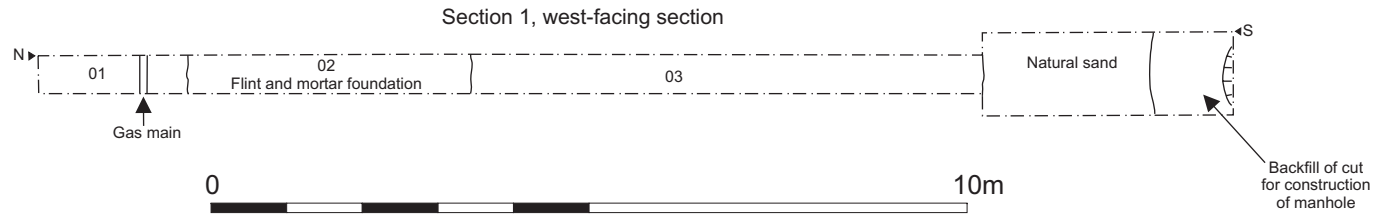


Figure 3. Plan of pipe trench, showing location of Section 1. Scale 1:100

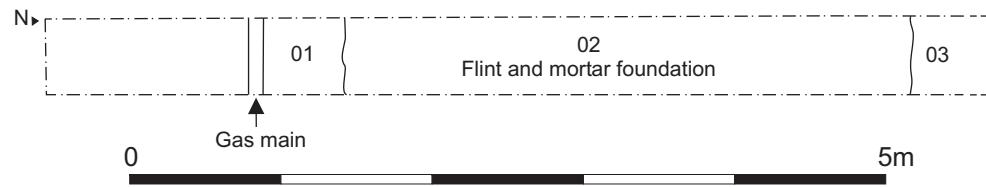


Figure 4. Detail of north end of pipe trench. Scale 1:50

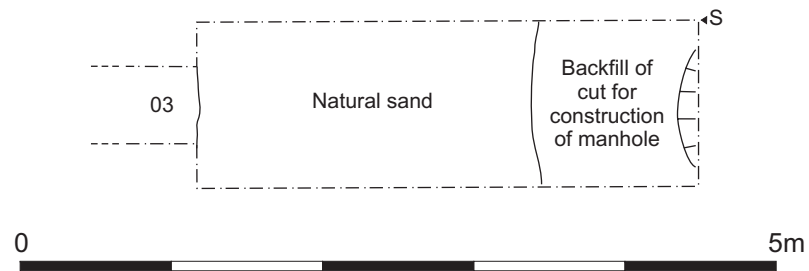


Figure 5. Detail of south end of trench. Scale 1:50

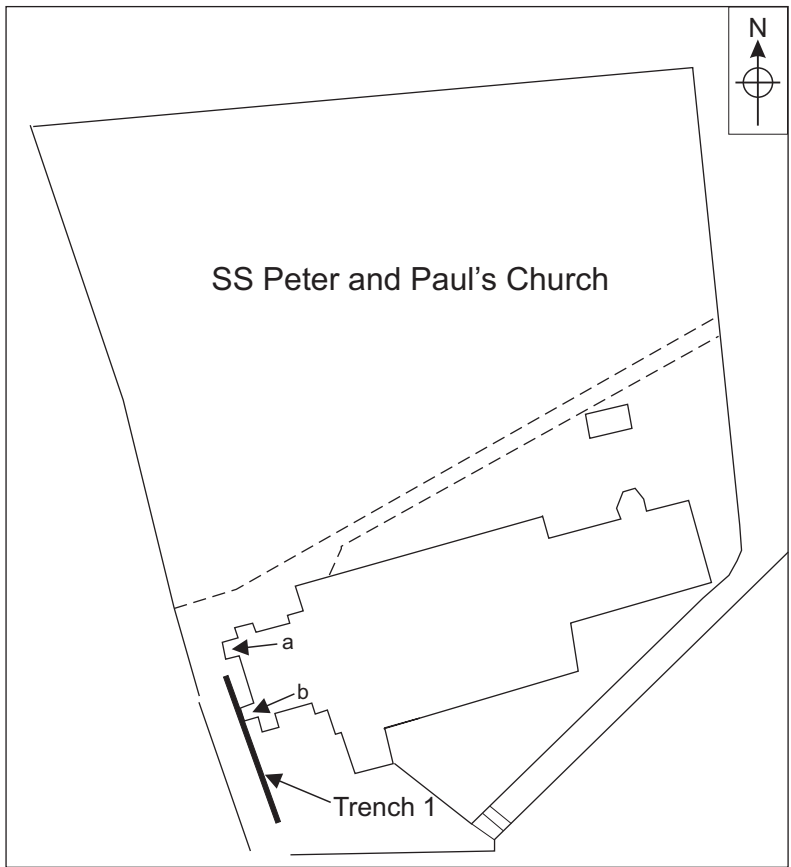


Figure 2. Trench location. Not to scale.

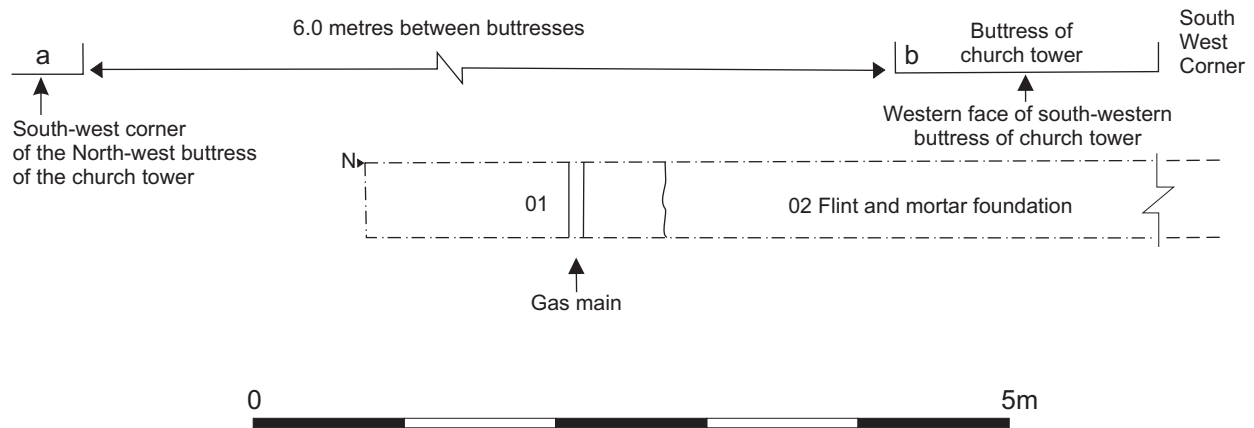


Figure 2a. Plan of trench location in relation to the south-west buttress of the west tower of the church. Scale 1:50