

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 854

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
St Mary's Chapel,
New Buckenham**

39594

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October 2003

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Local Authority No.076759

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Location: St Mary's Chapel, New Buckenham

Grid Ref: TM 0850 9035

HER No.: 39594

Date of Fieldwork: 7th August 2003

Summary

A watching brief was carried out during ground works in advance of the conversion of St Mary's Chapel to a residential building. The area (48m²) within the walls of a former barn at the west end of the chapel was lowered and a wall was revealed. This wall seems likely to have formed the south side of an extension to the chapel which was shown on an early map of the area. Also recorded in this area were two post-holes and two pieces of dressed and worked stone which had been reused as post supports – all these related to the construction of the former barn. Trenches for a drain and related soak-away were excavated to the south of the building and a possible pit was revealed in one side of the soak-away.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

The Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) undertook a watching brief at St Mary's chapel which is located approximately 100m outside, and to the south-east of, the moated New Buckenham Castle in Old Buckenham parish. The present work was necessitated by groundworks involved in the conversion, to residential use of the chapel and the walls of a former barn attached to it. These works included the lowering of the ground level within the area of the former barn (8 x 6m) and the excavation of a trench from this building into the field to its south where a large soak-away pit was dug. Another proposed trench, for a sewer, along the south side of the building was not excavated as its required level was above the present ground surface.

The work was commissioned and funded by the landowner Christopher Pearson who was carrying out the conversion of the building.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJ Hutcheson 30 April 2003) and a Method Statement for watching briefs prepared by the NAU.

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 is of upper chalk (BSG 1985) with overlying Norwich brickearth and colluvial deposits. The site lies on level ground at a height of about 48.50m OD, approximately 500m to the west of the centre of the modern village centre. A stream runs just to the south of the site.

3.0 Archaeological and historical background

The foundation of St Mary's Chapel probably dates to c.1140. It is thought to have served the newly founded town of New Buckenham being maintained by priests from St James's Priory which had been founded by William d'Albini on the site of the former castle of Old Buckenham (Heywood 1997). By 1300 the new town had outgrown the Chapel and the present parish church was built. It appears, however, that the chapel continued in use, serving the nearby New Buckenham Castle. The chapel had been converted into a barn by 1736 (Blomefield 1805) and it is shown as barn on a map of 1693 (Heywood 1997, fig. 2). On a map of 1841, a small extension is shown at the north-western corner of the building (Heywood 1997, fig. 4). This does not appear on the map of 1693 but is considered possibly to have provided accommodation for the resident canon and may be of 15th-century date (Heywood 1997, 4).

In the late 18th century the walls of the chapel were heightened, the roof reconstructed and, at the western end of the building, an open-fronted farm building was added. The latter was largely destroyed by fire in the early to mid 20th-century leaving only the brick walls at its southern and western sides standing (as at the time of the present work).

Significant numbers of finds have been collected during fieldwalking from the field immediately to the south-west of St Mary's Chapel. They consist mainly of pottery of Romano-British, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date as well as other finds including roof tile, clay tobacco pipe, lava quernstone, and slag (HER 9200).

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during groundworks for the conversion of St Mary's Chapel and its adjoining barn walls. The Brief required constant attendance during these works.

In the area within the walls of the former barn the ground level was reduced by 0.40m to 0.60m. This methodology differed to that originally proposed (i.e. the excavation of foundation trenches along the north and south sides of the building). The southern part of the area had already been lowered by mechanical excavator utilising a ditching bucket, prior to the arrival of the archaeologist but work had stopped due to the discovery of masonry remains. The rest of the area was excavated by machine under archaeological supervision. The masonry was left upstanding and was partly hand-cleaned for the purpose of recording.

Exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. Metal-detected finds were of relatively recent date and were not retained.

Further groundworks consisted of a trench and a large soak-away pit which were dug by machine to the south of the barn and monitored by the archaeologist.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations and plans were recorded at appropriate scales and sketch drawings were also made. Colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

A level was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark of 48.77m on the southern side of St Mary's Chapel.

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

Site conditions were good. The weather was hot and sunny but shade was provided by the up-standing walls so that photography was not hindered.

5.0 Results (Appendix 1)

(Fig. 3)

The area of the former barn

A chamfered footing plinth [9] at the base of the west wall of St Mary's Chapel was probably the earliest evidence revealed by the groundworks. It was seen beneath a thin layer of concrete associated with repairs to the wall and ran for just over a metre from the north-west corner of the chapel to the blocked in doorway in the west wall.

Across most of the machine-excavated area, a deposit of brown sand silt clay with moderate numbers of flints, occasional small fragments of ceramic building material and flecks of charcoal and mortar was revealed on the surface. There were occasional patches of chalk-flecked light brown clay and orange sand which may have been redeposited natural material. Undisturbed natural subsoil was not reached. At the south side of the area, a darker patch of soil might have represented an infilled pit or may have been a localised variation in the general deposit of soil. In the north-west part of the stripped area another possible feature consisted of an area of darker brown silt soil was seen in section beneath the wall (see below). This was seen only in section (see archive) and no finds were recovered from it.

The material overlaying the machine-exposed deposits in the southern part of the area was not observed during its excavation but in section it appeared to consist of mixed brown soil, similar to that described above in the lower part with large amounts of mortar and other debris higher up near the former ground surface. This was consistent with the material removed from the northern part of the area and represented some kind of build up of soil with the upper material, which included some burnt debris, possibly originating from the destruction of the barn in the 20th century.

Within the machine-stripped area, the remains of a wall [6] were recorded. The wall ran east-to west, turning at a right angle and extending beyond the north edge of the excavated area. Along its north side was a line of darker softer soil which was almost certainly the fill of a construction cut. The make up of the wall varied. It was most substantial along its east-to-west length [7] where its maximum height exposed, to its west end, was 0.41m. Here it was made up almost entirely of flint and cream-coloured lime mortar with an occasional fragment of brick. The south face of the east-to-west wall was quite regular in appearance with flints (average size 0.10m) neatly laid suggesting that this external face had originally been exposed above ground level. A loamy brown soil had accumulated against the wall and become lodged between the flints on top of the mortar. The lower part of the north face of this part of the wall was more irregular and had a pale-coloured clayey soil adhering to it rather than the loamy soil seen higher up and on the south side. It seems likely that this part of the wall may have been originally below ground level inside the building. The bottom of the masonry was not reached. At the east end of the east-to-west wall, to

the east of a later post-hole the masonry had been truncated to a lower level. It was thought possible that this may relate to the use of the later building (see below).

Near the west end of the stripped area the wall turned at 90°. This south-to-north part [8], which extended beyond the excavated area, was less substantial than the east-to-west part and did not extend down as far as the lowest excavated level. The surviving masonry was up to 0.25m in height and was irregular with a much higher frequency of bricks (used irregularly), and without the neatly laid flints. At the south-west corner of the wall, and at its east end where it abutted the original west wall of the chapel, the wall was strengthened by neatly laid red bricks.

Two post-holes [2] and [4] cut the east-to-west length of wall. The former was excavated and part of a burnt timber upright survived within it. A piece of glazed wall tile of Victorian or more recent date and a piece of plastic came from its fill. The post-holes related to the former barn. At the north edge of the excavated area two pieces of dressed and worked stone [10] and [11] had been re-used as supports for posts. The stones were 0.25m square and 0.52m and 0.64m high respectively. The stone supports were both of the same design with chamfered corners. They had clearly come from the same building – possibly the chapel itself. They were aligned with the post-holes and with two joist rebates at first floor level in the standing south wall of the barn. The stones may have been used here to increase the load-bearing property of posts which probably supported an open-fronted building.

Also associated with the barn was part of a brick floor [12] which was recorded in the north-west part of the building (extent shown on plan). It is of interest that the floor was only seen within the area of the earlier masonry wall [6] and that its level was only a few centimetres above that truncated wall. It would not have been possible for the floor to extend over the area of the wall – hence it seems possible the earlier wall was still standing, at least at its western end, when the barn was built. If this were the case, it may be that the more heavily truncated eastern end was deliberately demolished to allow access into the main area of the barn.

The drain and soak-away

The trench for the drain was about 0.40m wide and sloped down from just outside the barn where it was about a metre in depth to a depth of 1.50m at the soak-away in the field to the south. It cut through a sandy subsoil and at its south end, into the undisturbed natural dark orange-coloured sand. The soak-away pit was 3.50 x 3.20m in size and up to 2.20m deep. The natural sand was seen at a depth of 0.80m and this was overlaid by a layer of stoney orange subsoil and by the topsoil. An area of disturbance, possibly a pit of some kind, was seen in the north side of the soak away. Fragments of brick and tile of post-medieval date and pieces of bone were found in the disturbed soil.

6.0 The finds (Appendix 2)

6.1 Ceramic building material

The site produced three pieces of post-medieval building material (0.500kg [01]). The assemblage consists of a fragment of brick (0.428kg) and two pieces of flat roof tile (0.072kg).

7.0 The environmental evidence

7.1 Faunal remains (Appendix 3)

Summary

A total of 0.117kg of faunal remains were recovered from one context. Cattle, pig and sheep/goat were identified. All of the remains are from secondary butchering and food waste.

Methodology

The faunal assemblage was examined to identify species present and any butchering that had occurred to the bone. Bone was also examined carefully to determine whether human remains were present. Bone was recorded by count and weight.

Results and conclusions

Seventeen pieces of bone, totalling 0.177kg, were recovered from context [1]. All of the bone represented animal remains. Cattle, sheep/goat and pig were all identified, the remaining bone was identified as large mammal, the size and butchering would suggest cattle or horse. The elements present of the identifiable species are all from good quality meat producing bones, which have been butchered.

7.2 Shell

Oyster shell (0.013kg [01]) was recovered.

8.0 Conclusions

Undisturbed natural deposits were not encountered within the area of the former barn. The exposed deposits appeared to represent a build up of soil of some kind. Two possible disturbances of this material (?possible pits) were observed but were unexcavated.

The wall which was uncovered by the present groundworks seems likely to be that shown on a map of 1841, considered by Stephen Heywood to represent the canon's house and possibly dating to the 15th century. It is noted that its position, just to the south of the small doorway in the west wall of the chapel would have enabled access the chapel as discussed by Heywood (1997, 4). The heavier truncation of the surviving wall to its east end was thought possibly to be deliberate and to relate to the use of the barn. Further groundworks related to the present building work will lower the top of the surviving wall slightly prior to the laying of concrete across the area. This will probably result in the loss, within the area of the former barn, of the north-to-south part of the wall which did not extend as far down as the east to west length. The latter will almost certainly survive, albeit at a level slightly lower than that presently recorded.

Part of a brick floor, exposed more or less at modern ground level, related to the use of the barn and its level, in relation to the west end of the surviving (earlier) wall suggested that that part of the wall may have still stood to some extent when the floor was laid.

Nothing of archaeological significance was revealed in the drain trench to the south of the former barn. A disturbance or possibly a pit, seen in the south-facing section of the soak-away pit contained fragments of brick and tile of post-medieval date as well as some pieces of animal bone.

Addendum

During backfilling of excavations west of the south-west corner of the chapel a coin was recovered by the contractors and Mr Pearson kindly forwarded it to NAU for identification. The coin is a George III halfpenny (1770-1775) in poor condition (identification by Dr Adrian Marsden).

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned and funded by Christopher Pearson. Thanks are due to him and to Mrs Pearson for their help and interest.

The fieldwork was carried out by Sarah Bates and the finds were examined and reported on by Julie Curl (animal bone) and Lucy Talbot (other finds) This report was illustrated and produced by Maggie Footitt and edited by Alice Lyons.

Bibliography

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Appendix 1: Context summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Fill or disturbance within soak-away	Post-medieval
2	Cut	Post-hole	Post-medieval
3	Deposit	Fill of [3]	Post-medieval
4	Cut	Post-hole	Post-medieval
5	Deposit	Fill of [4]	Post-medieval
6	Deposit	Wall	?late medieval
7	Deposit	East-to-west wall	?late medieval
8	Deposit	North-to-south wall	?late medieval
9	Masonry	Part of Chapel structure	Medieval
10	Deposit	Re-used stone	Post-medieval
11	Deposit	Re-used stone	Post-medieval
12	Deposit	Brick floor	Post-medieval

Appendix 2: Finds by context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
1	Post medieval ceramic building material	3	0.500	Post-medieval
1	Animal bone	-	0.177	Post-medieval
1	Shell	-	0.013	Post-medieval

Appendix 3: Faunal remains

Context	Species	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Comments
1	Cattle	1	0.023	Pelvis, chopped and showing signs of arthritis
1	Sheep/goat	2	0.010	Butchered scapula and pelvis fragments
1	Pig	1	0.040	Butchered juvenile tibia
1	Mammal	13	0.104	Butchered large mammal fragments

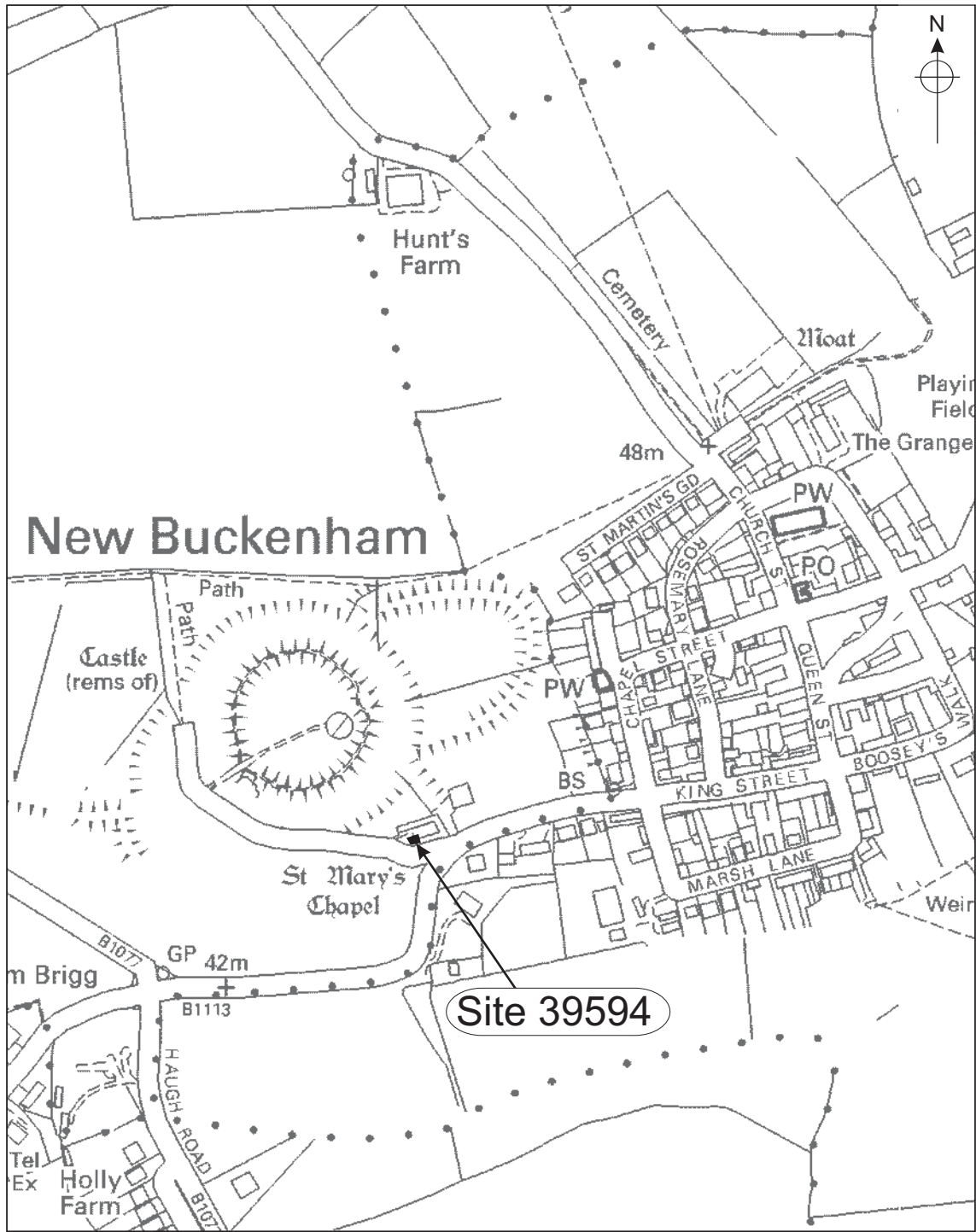


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

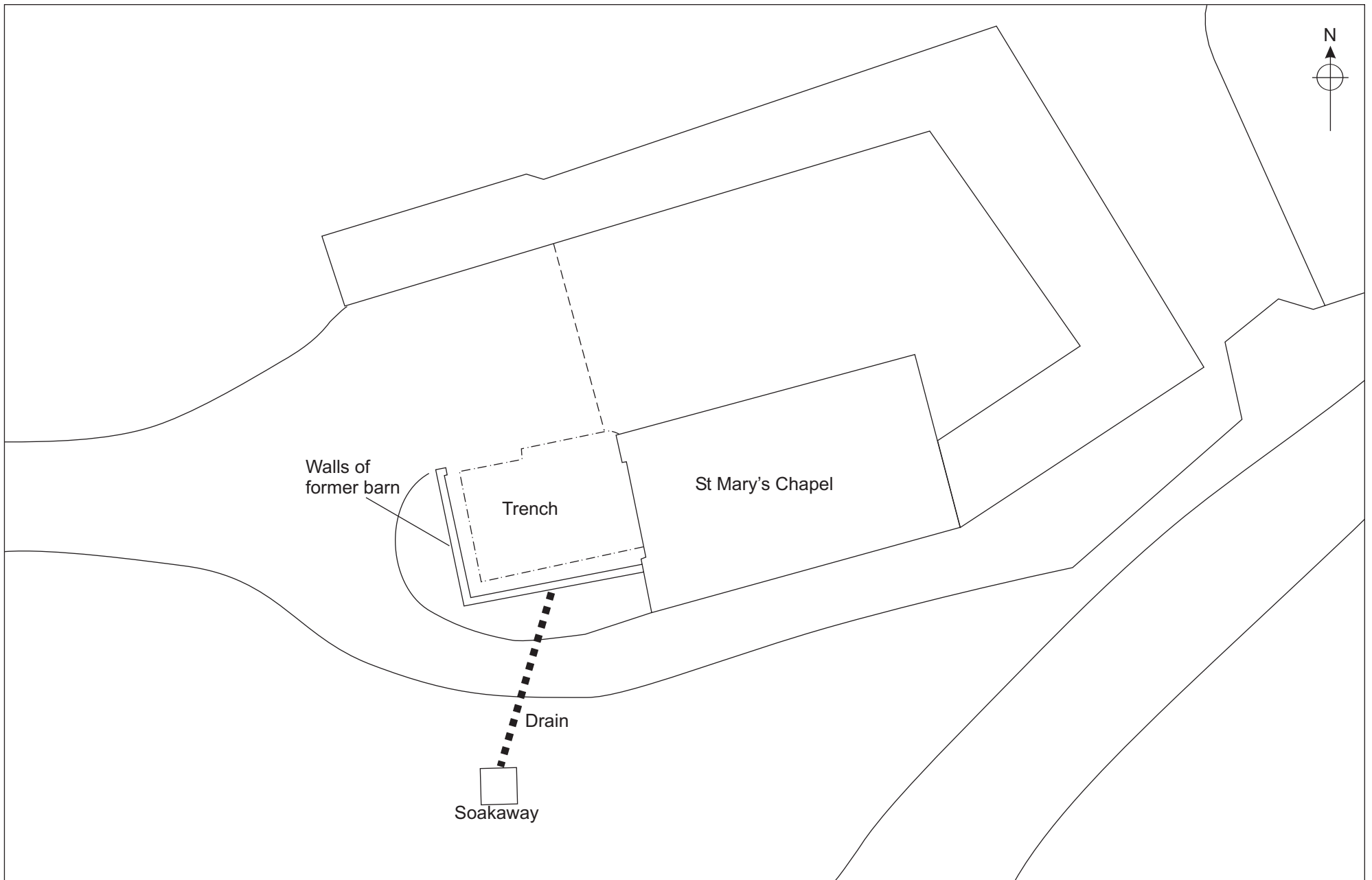


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:250

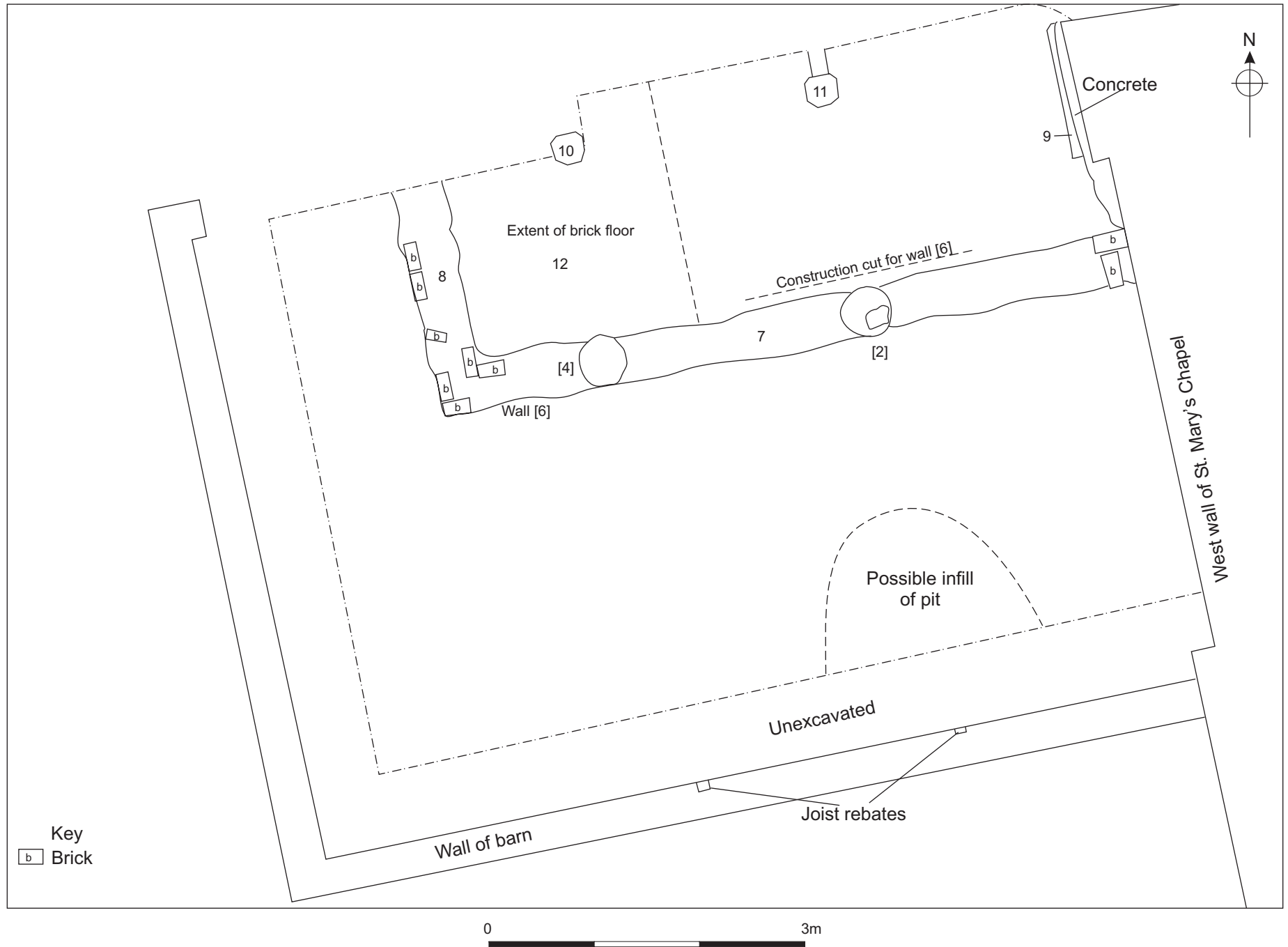


Figure 3. Plan of excavated area within former barn. Scale 1:50