

**NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

Report No. 838

**An Archaeological Evaluation at  
St Mary's Church, Newton Flotman, Norfolk**

10119 NWF

Kenneth Penn

June 2003

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Local Authority No.076759

Fig.1 is based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 'Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings' Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Norwich (12/07/2003). **Reference copy: no further copies to be made.**



Location: St Mary's church, Newton Flotman, Norfolk  
Grid Ref: TM 2130 9848  
HER No.: 10119 NWF  
Date of Fieldwork: 6th to 7th May 2003

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## **Summary**

*An evaluation excavation in the churchyard of St Mary's church in Newton Flotman, in advance of a proposed extension to the church building, revealed a number of graves. One of the burials lay partly below the foundations for the north wall of the church, below the blocked north door. Two others may pre-date the cut for the foundations, whilst the majority post-date the construction of the church. This sequence of at least one burial below the present church foundation may suggest the presence of an earlier church, either of wood or masonry, although no physical evidence for this structure was found.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

The site lay in the churchyard of St Mary's, Newton Flotman, and involved the excavation of a trench within the footprint of a proposed new extension to the church, on its north side. The trench was approximately 1.8m wide and 7m in length, orientated north to south, running out from the north wall of the church.

The work was undertaken for Matthew Thomas (Architect) and his Client, Newton Flotman PCC.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH 6/11/02) and a Project Design prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: JB/1470 Nov 2002).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

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**

Fig. 1

The site lies on a bluff overlooking the River Tas to the south, at a height of c.28m. The natural subsoil generally is Boulder Clay, but is here a clayey sand. The A140, in origin a Roman road, runs past the church

### 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Fig. 2

The church is of medieval date and has three main elements: west tower, nave and chancel. The chancel has a vestry on the north side and the present entrance porch is on the south side of the nave. On the north side is a blocked door, possibly an earlier main entrance.

Although the church is now mostly 'late Victorian' after restoration in the 1890s, it incorporates fabric of the earlier church. The south porch is apparently of 17th century date but there are traces of an earlier porch with parvise above. The north door (blocked) may be 14th century in date (Pevsner, 562). Tower donations are recorded from 1431 (Historic Environment Record).

Overall, it is a masonry church of medieval date with origins in the later 11th or 12<sup>th</sup> century, while the later medieval date for elements of the present church suggests a major rebuilding at some date. On this point, Blomefield says that the church was rebuilt in 1385, but gives no authority for this (Blomefield 1806, V, 68).

Newton was recorded in Domesday Book.

### 4.0 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that a single trench be excavated, 1.8m wide and 7m or 8m long.

Machine excavation was carried out with a tracked mini-digger using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

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

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using 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.

Levelling was carried out from an OS bench mark on the south-west corner of the tower, with a value of 29.18m.

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

The site was part of the present churchyard, grassy and with monuments restricting machine working to some extent.

### 5.0 Results

Figs 2, 3 & 4

The trench was laid out against the north wall of the church, to enable the depth and character of the foundations to be recorded and to see whether any graves lay below the wall. The topsoil ([23]) was a dark brown-black loam, containing material of modern date. This was c.0.20m deep and overlay a mixed soil ([24]) and a deep

deposit of red-brown sandy and silty loam ([33]), the result of continuous cutting of graves and circulation of the same material. It was very difficult to discern individual cuts for graves, except where they cut the natural subsoil, although slight variations in the colours of their fills were apparent.

The trench ran from the foundations of the church wall ([17]), where the cut ([18]) for these could be identified, together with its fills: basal fill [22], masonry foundation [17] and the backfill of foundation [25].

The nature of the soils and the repeated cutting of graves and mixing of fills made identification of grave cuts and fills difficult. However, if [18] is the cut for the masonry foundations [17], then graves [10] and [12] appear to pre-date this cut and the wall. Given the problems of identification, this is not entirely certain.

What is certain is that grave [15] underlay the foundation trench and the wall. This feature was excavated as far as it could be seen and found to run below the wall, cutting about 0.15m into the natural subsoil, and to contain large pieces of long bones.

Once identified by the bones they mostly contained, the other graves were planned and not excavated further.

Finds were few; grave [10] produced a single sherd of medieval pottery from its basal fill ([11]).

## **6.0 The Finds**

The only find, apart from the modern material present throughout the topsoil, was a single sherd of early medieval unglazed pottery, found in the basal fill ([11]) of grave [10].

## **7.0 Conclusions**

Although no evidence of an earlier church, either of masonry or wood, was seen, the grave underlying the wall foundation suggests burial here pre-dating the present church and thus suggests the presence of an earlier church. The stratigraphy of excavation close to church walls is often obscured by constant cutting and recutting through earlier graves fill, and cuts for graves and foundation trenches may be difficult to discern.

At St Mary's church, what may be the cut for a foundation trench ([18]) appears to cut through a soil that in turn appears to seal several graves. If this was the case, then it is further evidence that the present church post-dates the beginning of burial here.

Recommendations for future work based on this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

### ***Acknowledgements***

The work was carried out by the author assisted by Becky Crawford. We are grateful to Matthew Thomas for his advice. Bryn Williams supplied the machine for this work. The report was illustrated and produced by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

## ***Bibliography***

- Blomefield, F., 1806 *A Topographical History of Norfolk* Volume V
- Pevsner, N. and Wilson, B., 1999 *The Buildings of England, Norfolk 2: North-West and South*





## Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context Number	Type	Description
1	Cut	Grave cut
2	Deposit	Fill of grave [1]; brown silt
3	Cut	Grave cut, ?below [1]
4	Deposit	Fill of grave [3] brown silt
5	Cut	Grave cut
6	Deposit	Fill of grave [5], brown silt
7	Cut	Cut for grave
8	Cut	Cut for grave
9	Deposit	Fill of grave [8]; mid red-brown silt-sand
10	Cut	Cut for grave
11	Deposit	Fill of grave [10]; mid red-brown silt-sand
12	Cut	Cut for grave
13	Deposit	Fill of grave? mid red-brown silt-sand
14	Deposit	Fill of grave? mid red-brown silt-sand
15	Cut	Cut for grave
16	Deposit	Fill of grave [15]; mid red-brown silt-sand
17	Masonry	Masonry wall foundation
18	Cut	Cut for masonry wall [17]
19	Deposit	Fill of grave? Brown silt
20	Deposit	Fill of grave? Brown silt
21	Deposit	Fill of grave? Brown silt
22	Deposit	Fill of foundation trench, below [17]; layers of silts, mottled at base
23	Deposit	Topsoil, dark brown-black sandy loam
24	Deposit	Topsoil and mixed soil, brown
25	Deposit	Upper fill of [18], above wall [17], mixed grey-brown sandy loam
26	Cut	Cut for pit
27	Deposit	Fill of [26], mid brown silt-sand with mortar fragments
28	Cut	Cut for pit
29	Deposit	Fill of [28], as [27]
30	Cut	Cut for pit
31	Deposit	Fill of [30], as
32	Deposit	Mixed soil; grey-yellow-brown loam and sand and gravel
33	Deposit	Mixed subsoil and grave fills, mid-brown silt

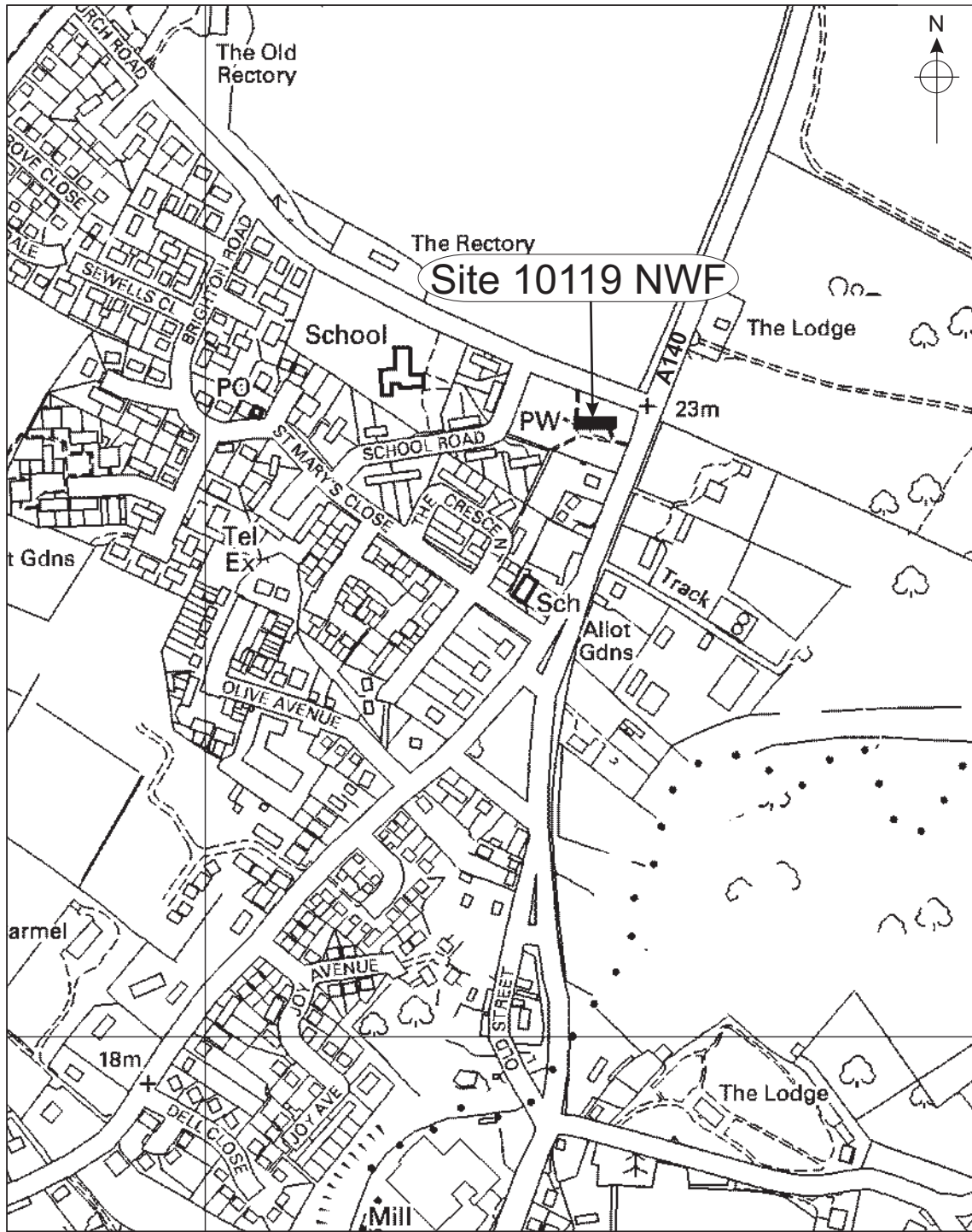


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:5000

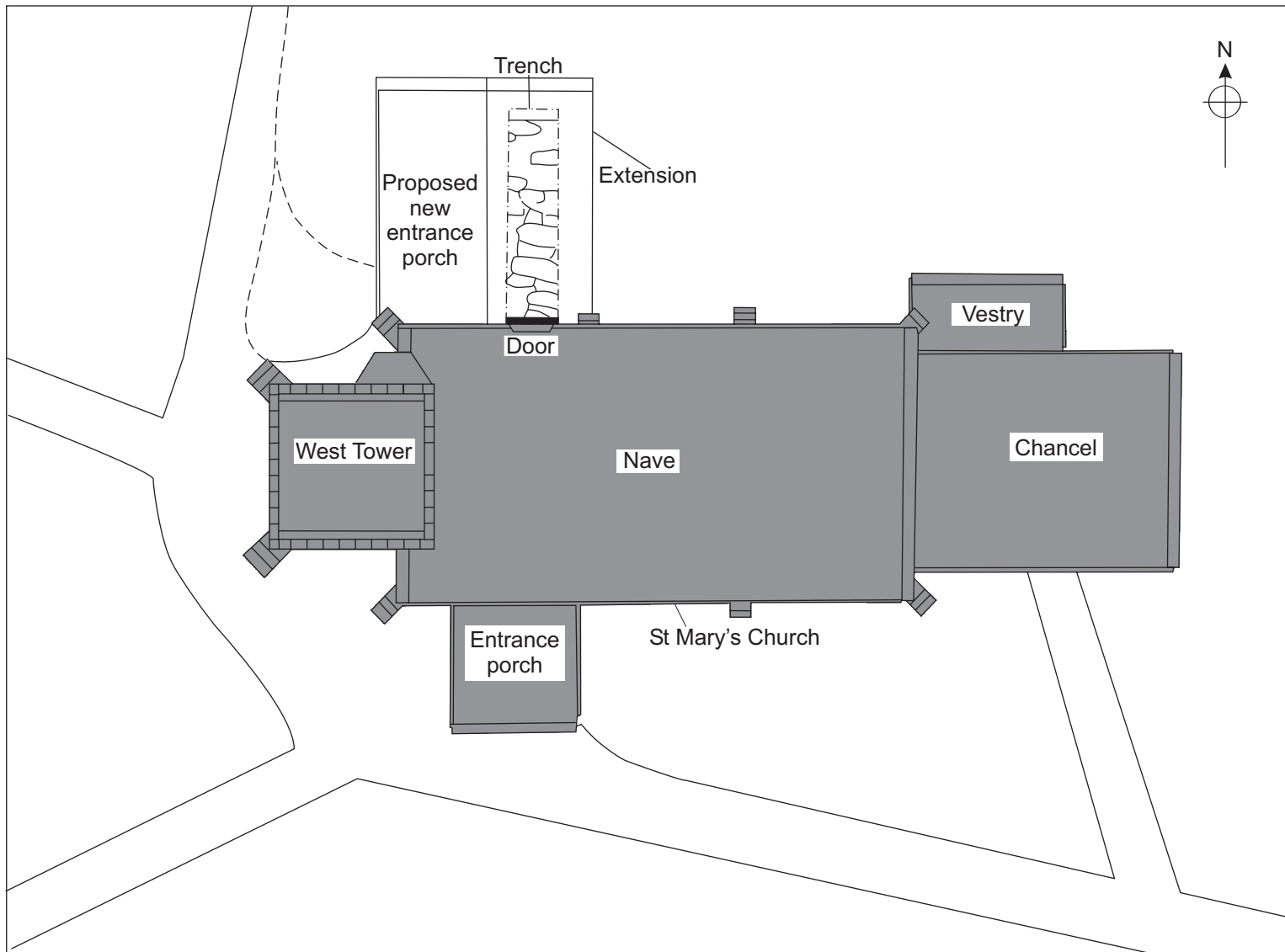


Figure 2. Plan of Church, with trench and main features. Scale 1:200

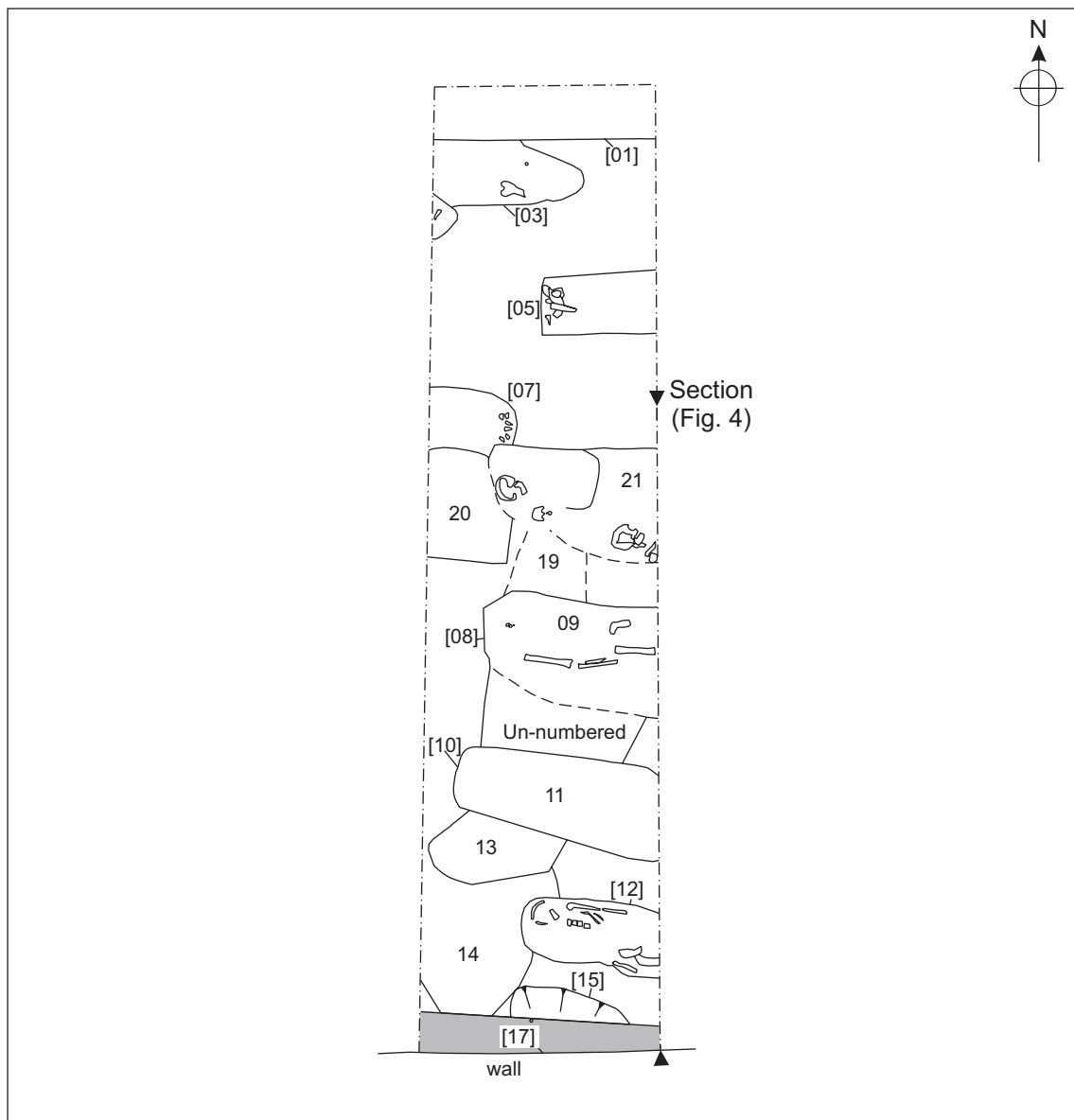


Figure 3. Plan of Trench, showing graves. Scale 1:50

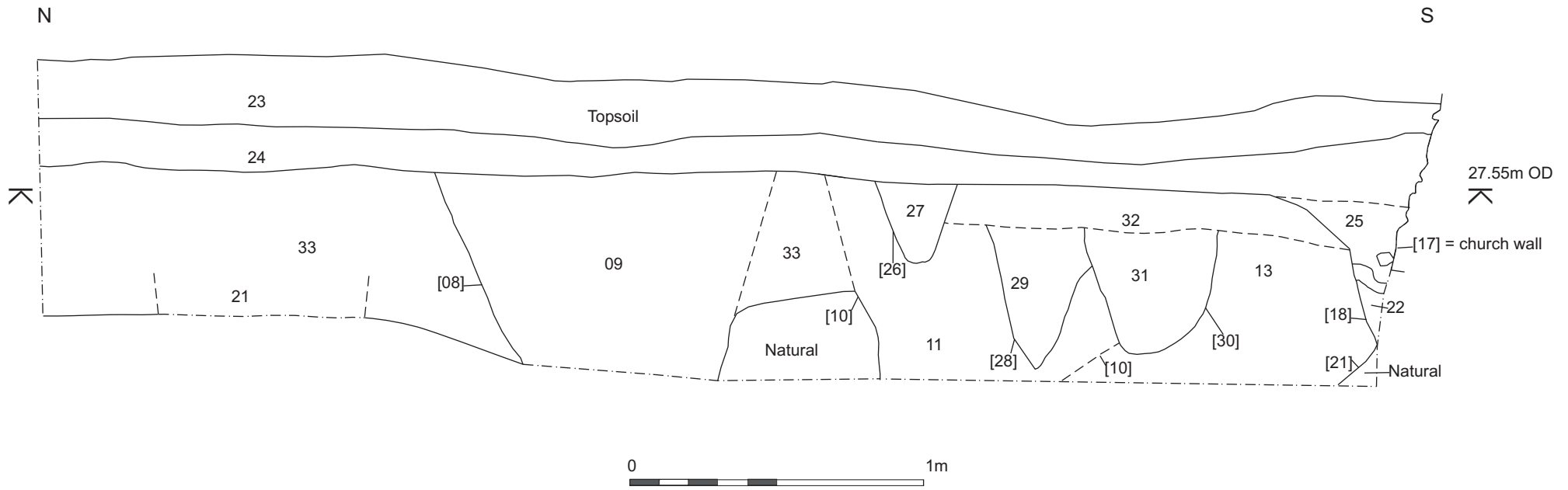


Figure 4. Section, along east-side of trench (south end). Scale 1:20