

**NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

Report No. 797

**Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at  
St John's Church, Waxham, Norfolk**

8372 SEP

Ben Philip Hobbs

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Local Authority No.076759

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Location: St John's Church, Waxham Norfolk  
Grid Ref: TG 4406 2623  
HER No.: 8372 SEP  
SAM No.: 12703  
Date of Fieldwork: 9th July, 16th July 2002 and 16th January 2003

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief monitoring the excavation of drainage trenches on the south side of the church of St John's Waxham and observing the removal and reinstatement of wooden floors on the north and south nave aisles inside the church was carried out. The archaeological work was undertaken over three separate days. One slightly disturbed burial was observed in the base of the central inspection tank hole south of the church. Inside the church, post-medieval make-up layers were revealed and under the south nave aisle part of a stone plinth, along with holes possibly caused by stone robbing, were recorded.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Fig. 1

An archaeological watching brief to observe exterior drainage trenches and the removal of wooden flooring from the north and south sides of the aisle inside of St John's Church, Waxham was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU). The work was funded by the Waxham PCC and commissioned by Birdsall, Swash and Blackman Chartered Architects. A Faculty was granted by the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Norwich and English Heritage Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent was applied for and given.

The existing wood floor of the nave needed to be replaced and a sub-floor ventilation channel installed. This necessitated the lifting of the decayed floor and excavating deposits beneath. The aim of the watching brief was to archaeologically supervise the removal of any deposits and to look for any possible evidence relating to the foundation of the church.

The archaeological work was carried out over three days six months apart, to fit in with the programme of building work. The first phase of the watching brief observed drainage trenches outside the church, the second phase was concerned with works within the church.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology and a Method Statement for watching briefs prepared by the NAU.

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

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the NAU *pro forma* sheets. Plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Site observations outside the church were not effected by the weather while conditions within the church were adequate for photography.

## **2.0 Observations**

Figs. 2 & 3

### **The Drainage Trenches**

Trenches, inspection tank holes and a soakaway on the south side of the church were monitored during excavation. The trench was 0.5m wide and ranged in depth from 0.5m to 0.9m and the inspection tank holes were between 1.0m and 1.1m deep. The soakaway was excavated to 1.7m depth.

One burial was slightly disturbed during excavation at the base of the central inspection tank hole. The bone remained *in situ* and the rest of the burial remained in tact. Although a small amount of disarticulated human bone was encountered in the drainage trenches, no other articulated burials were observed.

Where the foundation of the south wall of the church was exposed it was seen to consist of flint nodules in a very white lime mortar.

No artefacts were recovered.

### **Inside the Church**

The building contractors first removed the pews from the existing flooring and then stripped the old wooden planking to expose the underlying deposits. This was initially a loose dusty material which was probably just detritus accumulated under the floorboards over time. Beneath this was a compacted reddish brown silty sand with occasional inclusions of mortar and brick fragments and small stones. This deposit was c.0.3m beneath the level of the aisle floor. The exposed area on both the north and south sides of the nave measured 7.16m by 2m.

All the spoil removed from the church was spread on plastic sheeting outside to await removal from site. This was inspected by the archaeologist but no evidence of worked stone or artefactual material was recovered.

### **The South Side of the Nave**

On the south side of the nave and against the edge of the central aisle a 0.28m high modern brick wall, of one brick width, rested on the compact red brown deposit and was situated so that the wood floor could rest level with the tiles of the aisle floor. The wall had four gaps in it, the westernmost three coinciding with depressions in the compact silt sand deposit. All three depressions were approximately 0.15m deep and extended under the central aisle floor.

The depressions cut through what appeared to be a series of thin mortar surface layers with evidence of the reddish brown silty sand and occasional darker layers, as though burnt material was present. These layers were typically 2mm to 3mm thick. The depressions themselves were filled with loose dry sands.

In the second gap and associated depression from the west was observed the south face of a possible circular stone plinth ([5]). The top of this was 0.32m below the surface of the floor of the central aisle. The masonry appeared to be made of two distinct pieces of worked stone with a definite joint in the stonework. Above the plinth was a layer of thin mortar and sand bands as seen in the sides of the depressions

([4]). Above these bands was a 0.15m thick layer of red orange sandy clay ([3]) which lay directly beneath the loose dusty material ([2]) beneath the bricks of the aisle floor ([1]).

No further stonework was observed in the remaining two depressions and from the observations it was speculated that the pits originated from the robbing of stonework beneath the floor, although if this was the case, for some reason the stone plinth was left *in situ*.

Some of the underlying deposits were removed by the building contractors in constructing the base for the wooden floor within the exposed area to an average depth of 0.24m. The support for the new flooring consisted of three rows of bricks, one brick wide, set on a raised concrete base running the length of the exposed area. This underfloor construction was designed to allow air to pass under the floor to prevent the wood from rotting, as had happened to the replaced flooring. This was coupled with a series of holes to be drilled in the replacement wall panelling once the pew stalls had been replaced.

### **The North Side of the Nave**

In the north part of the nave the procedure of lifting the existing wooden floor and removing the underlying deposits were the same as the south nave. In this instance there were no depressions observed beneath the floor while the soil was being removed. The deposits were similar in consistency as those observed under the floor of the south nave. A light dusty deposit lay beneath the wooden floor which in turn covered a light brown silty sand which contained occasional brick rubble and small stones. This deposit appeared to be the same all along the length of the exposed soil.

Approximately the same amount of soil was removed to provide the underfloor ventilation space needed for the new floor, leaving a space c.0.26m between the level of the tiles of the aisle floor and the top of the sub-floor deposits.

Three narrow rows of bricks were laid on top of raised strips of concrete set directly on the sand deposit to support the floor. The top of these bricks were approximately 100mm down from the current tiled floor surface and the rows were spaced approximately 0.8m apart in order to provide a free flow of air beneath the replaced flooring.

## **3.0 Conclusions**

The drainage trenches revealed no evidence of an earlier phase of buildings being present on the south side of the church.

Inside the church the underlying deposits beneath the existing wooden floor of the nave were composed mainly of sand which contained fragments of post-medieval brick and mortar. The thin bands of sand and mortar seen in the south nave deposits were not observed in the sections against the central aisle walkway in the north nave and it is assumed that they were particular to the south side. These likely represent successive thin surface layers, perhaps just a scattered covering of light material to renew the floor surface.

The stone plinth observed in one of the depressions in the south nave area was not investigated any further than its initial observation within the sand. It was not ascertained therefore, whether this was part of the fabric of the church left *in situ* or if

it was a fragment of worked stone discarded within a layer of floor makeup. It was noted however, that no other stone was located and that a deposit of reddish brown silty sand was found beneath the stonework in section, similar in colour and consistency to that found across the exposed area of the north nave. This might indicate an isolated fragment, although the unbroken joint in the stonework perhaps implies an intact piece of masonry lying along the centreline of the church. This may represent the remains of an earlier phase in the fabric of the church, perhaps indicating the line of a columned aisle.

The deposits removed to the depth required by the building contractors on both sides of the nave were almost certainly post-medieval in origin and contained no dating evidence. The deposits seen in section along the edges of the excavated areas were similarly lacking in dating evidence and contained a moderate amount of post-medieval building rubble fragments.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thanks are due to Waxham PCC for funding the project. The archaeological watching brief was carried out by Gary Trimble, Peter Warsop and the author. The report was illustrated and produced by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

### ***Background Reading***

Gaffney, K.                    1998 *Report on a Watching Brief at Waxham barn, Waxham Hall Farm*, NAU Report No. 330 (unpublished)



### ***Appendix 1: Context Summary***

<b>Context</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description/interpretation</b>	<b>Period</b>
1	Masonry	Brickwork of aisle floor	Post-medieval
2	Deposit	Loose, dusty accumulation beneath (1)	Post-medieval
3	Deposit	Red-orange clayey silt	Post-medieval
4	Deposit	Thin bands of silt and mortar	Unknown
5	Masonry	?Round stone plinth	?Medieval
6	Deposit	Layer of creamy sandy mortar	?Medieval
7	Cut	Depression or 'robber pit'	Post-medieval



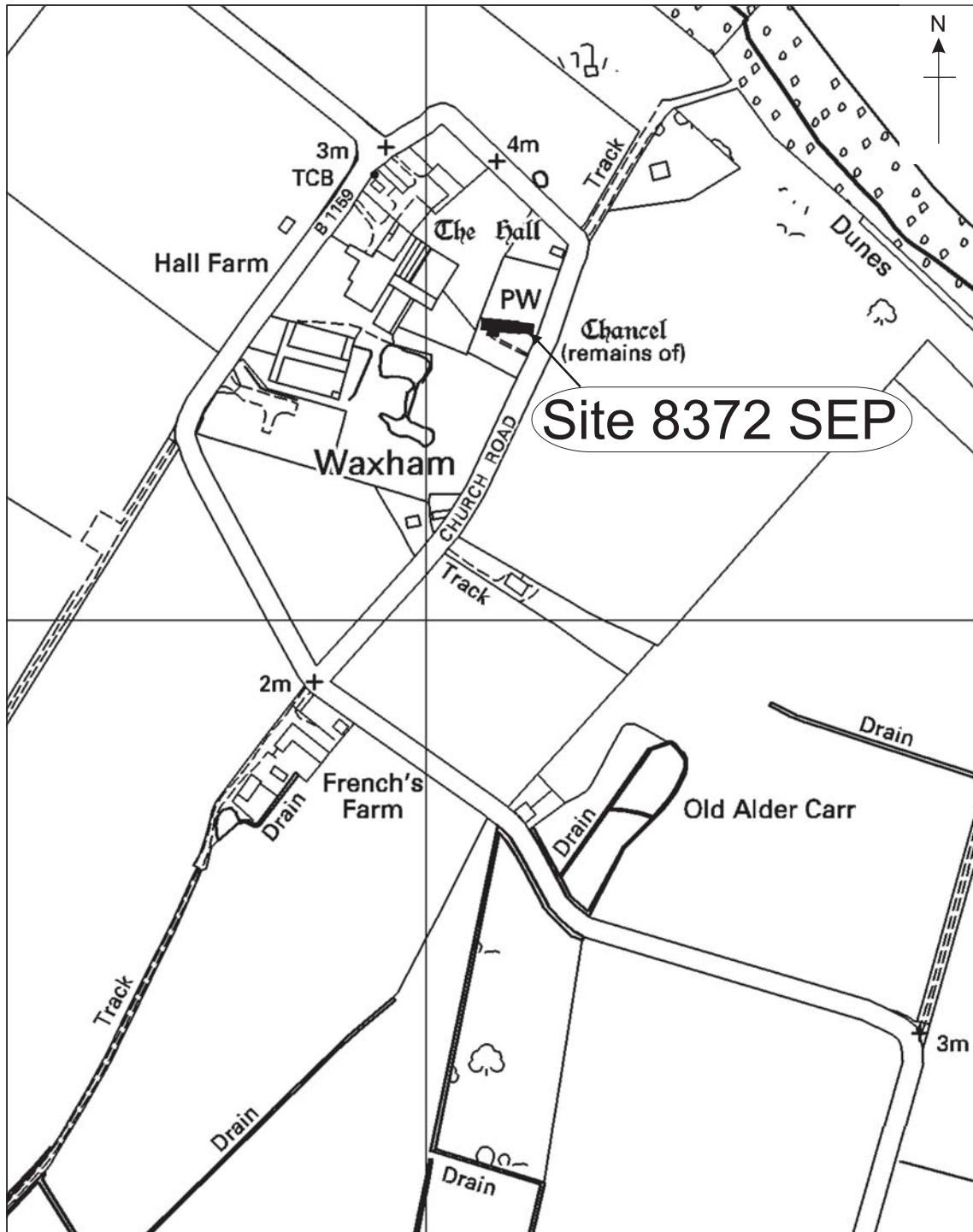


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:5,000

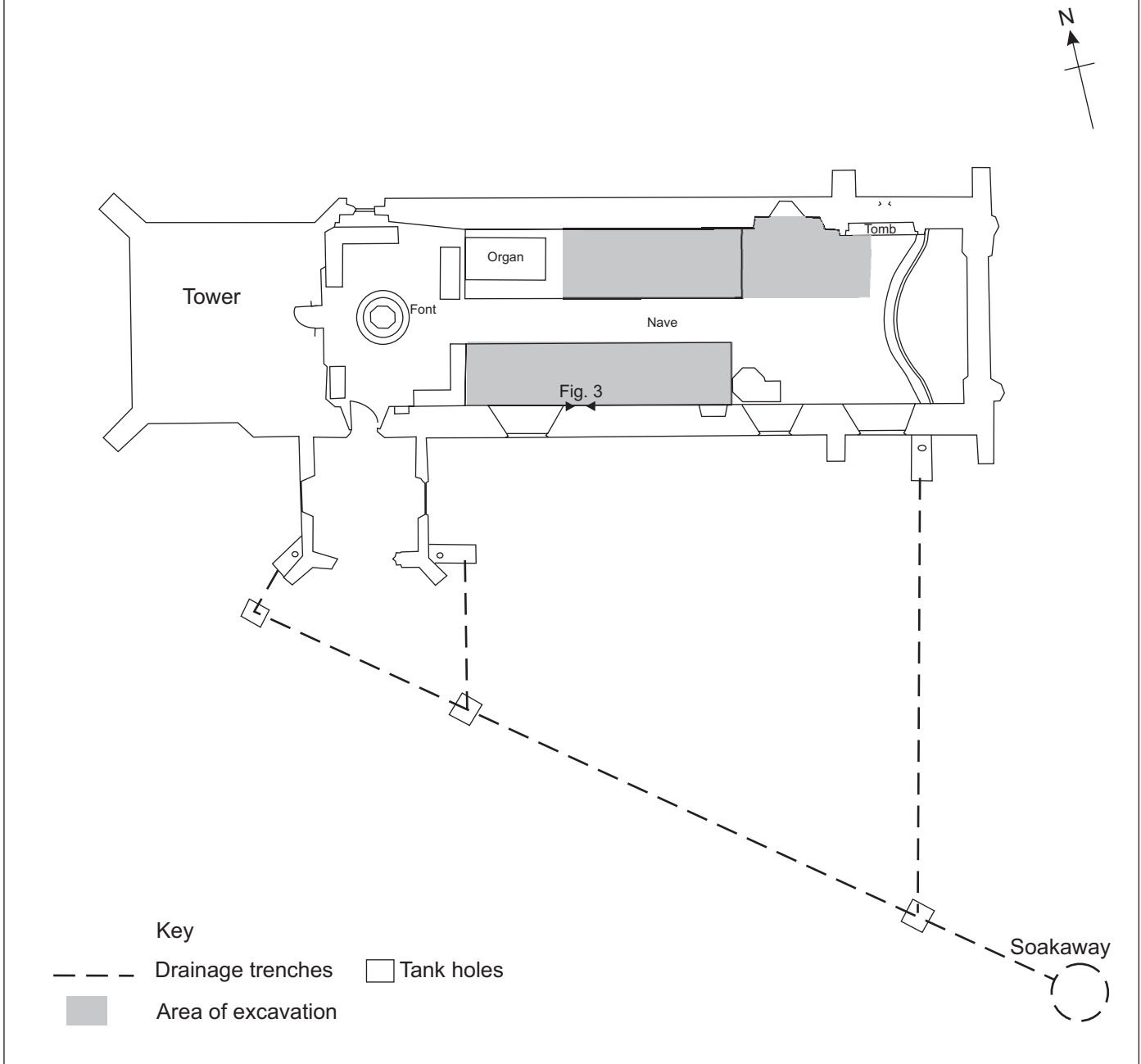


Figure 2. Trench Location. Not to scale

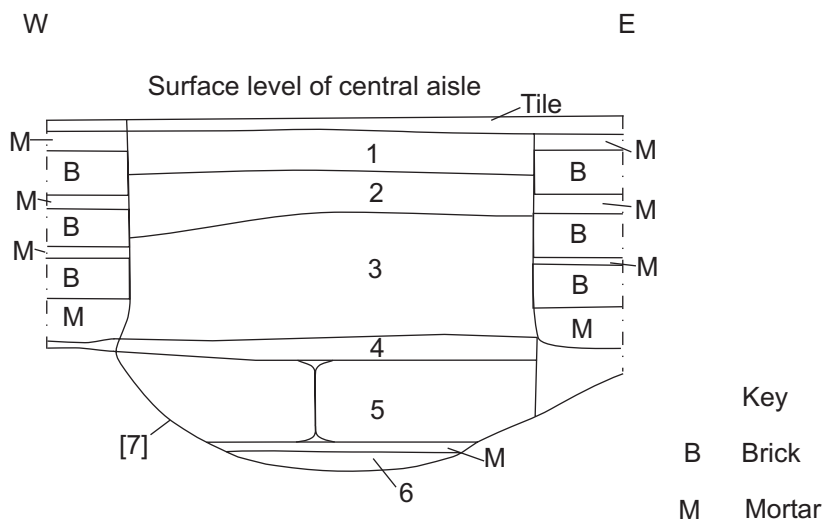
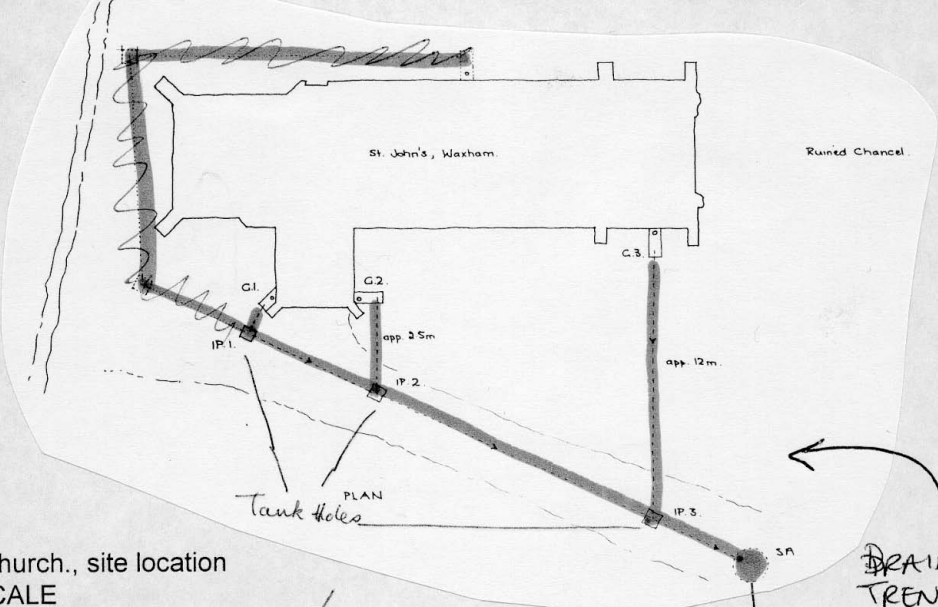


Figure 3. South-facing Section. Scale 1:10





Church., site location  
SCALE