

Report 2340



nau archaeology

## Archaeological Watching Brief at St Peter and St Paul's Church, East Harling, Norfolk

ENF125323



**Prepared for**  
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July 2011



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<i>Issue 1</i>		

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BAU 2340

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Location:	St Peter and St Paul's Church, East Harling, Norfolk
District:	Harling
Grid Reference:	TL 9899 8668
HER No.:	ENF125323
Listed Building No:	220546
OASIS Ref.:	99345
Client:	St Peter and St Paul's PCC
Dates of Fieldwork:	4 October 2010 - 18 February 2011 (intermittent)

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## **Summary**

*In the winter of 2010–11 improvements to the church of St Peter and St Paul in the village of East Harling resulted in a programme of archaeological monitoring works during the excavation of several service trenches and a pit for the installation of a water tank within the graveyard to the west. A second stage of works which included the excavation of a test pit was carried out on the inside of the church when replacement of the floor within the northern aisle revealed archaeologically significant deposits.*

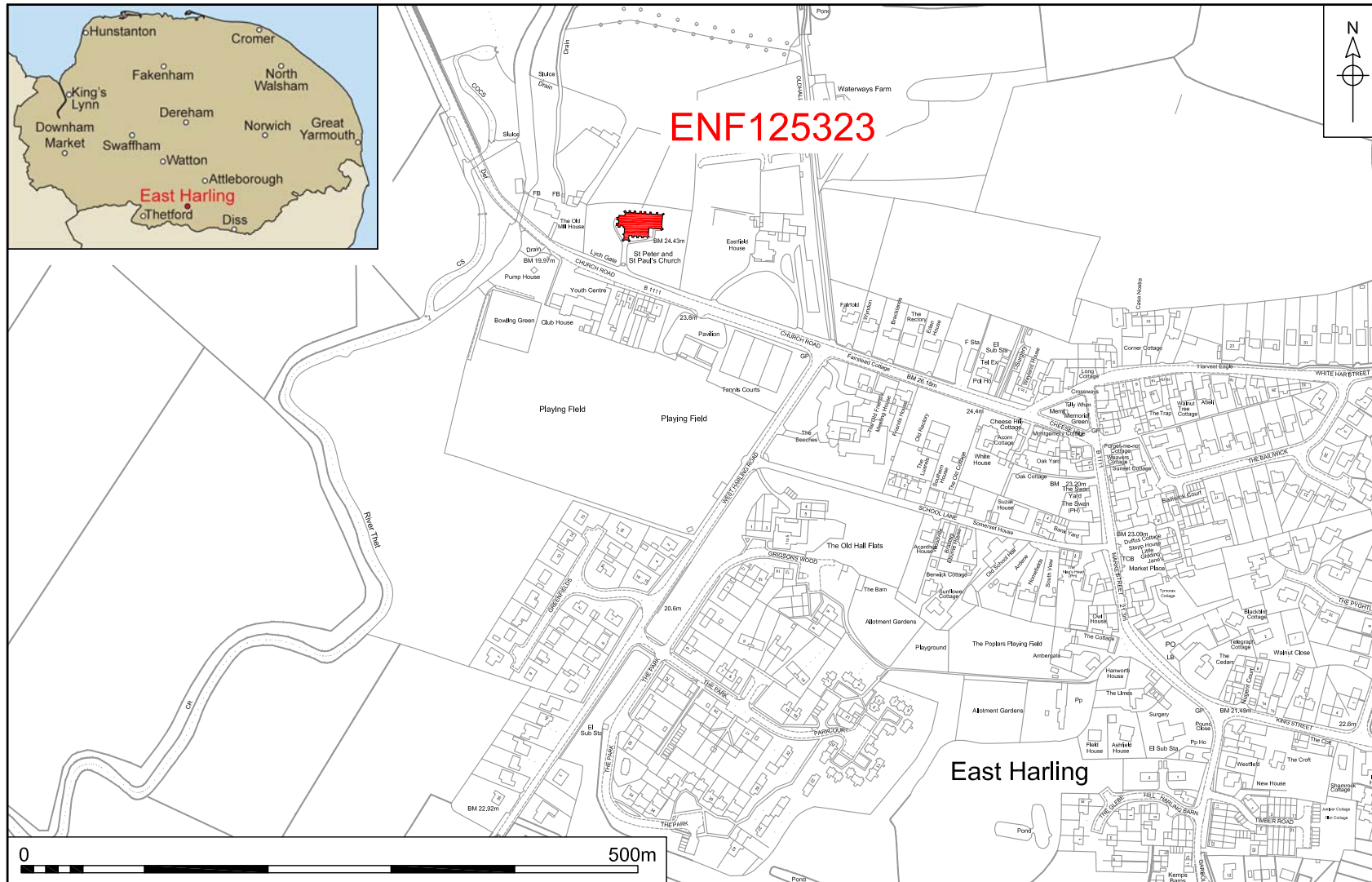
*The excavation of the service trenches in the graveyard revealed little of interest beyond the presence of graveyard soils however the greater depth required for a water tank uncovered a possible charnel pit containing the long bones of numerous individuals.*

*The internal alterations uncovered remnants of a possible wall footing on an east-west alignment with what may have been an associated floor surface to the north. Excavations to the south of these deposits revealed a soft ?post-medieval back fill material filling a large cut feature that probably extended across the length of the trench cutting graveyard soil to the north. At the base of this excavation a single grave was encountered containing a skeleton that (from its body position) appeared to have been buried in a shroud.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In October 2010 works began at St Peter and St Paul's church in East Harling to install a water supply inside the building and associated external drainage runs (Fig. 1). An area of floor was taken up in the northern aisle in preparation for its replacement. Because of the high potential to encounter archaeological remains in the areas affected Norfolk Historic Environment Service (NHES) issued a brief recommending a programme of archaeological monitoring take place during the works (CNF 41496). In response Birdsall, Swash and Blackman acting on behalf of the St Peter and St Paul's Parochial Parish Council commissioned NAU Archaeology to carry out the monitoring works according to an approved project design as prepared by Nigel Page (Ref:BAU2340).

This programme of 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 Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

## **2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

St Peter and St Paul's church lies upon a gentle eastern slope of the valley of the River Thet at a height of 24.43m OD. The church is located at the north-west limits of the centre of East Harling on the north side of Church Road; the modern focus of the village is half a kilometre south-east along this road. The river runs some 80m to the west of the church flowing south-west towards Thetford.

The underlying geology is upper chalk lain down during the Cretaceous with river terrace sands and gravels above (BGS 1985 and 1991). The resulting subsoil is a mid grey brown sandy silt beneath 300mm of dark grey brown sandy silt topsoil.

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The following background has been prepared with reference to the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER).

### **Prehistoric**

In 1929 a Beaker pot dating from between 2300 and 1700 BC was recovered from a gravel pit in a field 130m to the south of the church (NHER 6023).

A kilometre to the south-west of the churchyard a circular banked enclosure was identified in 1952 (NHER 6027). Associated pottery suggests it may have been of Iron Age date however it has since been ploughed out.

A single fragment of possible Iron Age pottery was recovered during a fieldwalking survey on land 400m to the east of the church (NHER 28936).

A prehistoric pot boiler site along with scatters of Iron Age pottery and worked flint was identified a kilometre to the east of the churchyard on a large area of land proposed for development as a golf course (NHER 28355)

A Neolithic polished flint axe head was found in a field 1km to the south of the churchyard (NHER 17717).

### **Roman**

Roman pottery fragments and other metal work objects of this period were encountered in a large area of land a kilometre to the east of the church (NHER 28355).

A Roman quern was dredged from the river approximately 1km to the south of the churchyard (NHER 17717)

A Roman coin was recovered during a fieldwalking and metal detecting survey carried out 900m to the south of the churchyard (NHER 19699).

### **Saxon**

A Late Saxon strap end, a stirrup mount and a 10th-century brooch were found during fieldwalking 900m to the south of the churchyard (NHER 19699).

Two late Saxon pot rims were recovered during the excavation of footings within the garden of White Rose Cottage on White Hart Street within the core of the village (NHER 19833).

Middle Saxon coin found during metal detecting on land 500m to the south of the churchyard (NHER 31465).

### **Medieval**

St Peter and St Paul's church dates from around 1300 with substantial alterations in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is known in particular for its fine stained glass east window (NHER 6049). Several sherds of Iron Age or Saxon pottery have been recovered from the graveyard.

Harling Old Hall was built in 1490 on land to the north and east of the churchyard. The manor site (NHER 6029) includes the remnants of fish ponds, a moat and several post-medieval structures. The hall was demolished in the 19th century.

Cropmarks to the east of the church may be the remnants of a moated enclosure belonging to the predecessor of Harling Old Hall. Medieval and post-medieval pottery and tile fragments have been recovered during fieldwalking (NHER 13028).

Several pieces of early medieval pottery and a lead openwork ventilation panel (NHER 28936) were retrieved during fieldwalking and metal detecting activities on land 400m to the east of the churchyard.

A medieval hearth, clay floors, ditches and pits (NHER 41030) were identified during an archaeological evaluation on Market Street some 400m distant from the church within the centre of East Harling.

### **Post-medieval**

The site of an 18th-century windmill (NHER 13816, identified from Faden's 1797 map of the area) lies just 160m to the south of the church although no trace survives on the ground.

The remnants of a post-medieval water mill (NHER 13817) lie just 50m to the east of the graveyard (also identified from Faden's map).

The site of a post-medieval dovecot demolished in 1964 lies 50m to the north of the church within the graveyard extension (NHER 6048). The building had been scheduled prior to its demolition and a knoll survived up until the later 20th century when it was flattened.

A post-medieval boathouse and the foundations of a second (undated) building (NHER 13818) were recorded to the north of the churchyard on the banks of the river some 220m distant.

Several undated enclosures including a ring ditch (NHER 58725) have been identified on land to the west of Harling Farm, 1km north-east of the church. These may be related to lime production attributed previously by place name evidence.

Approximately 700m to the west of the church a faint ridge (NHER 47140) has been postulated as a possible road line, although no date has been attributed to it.



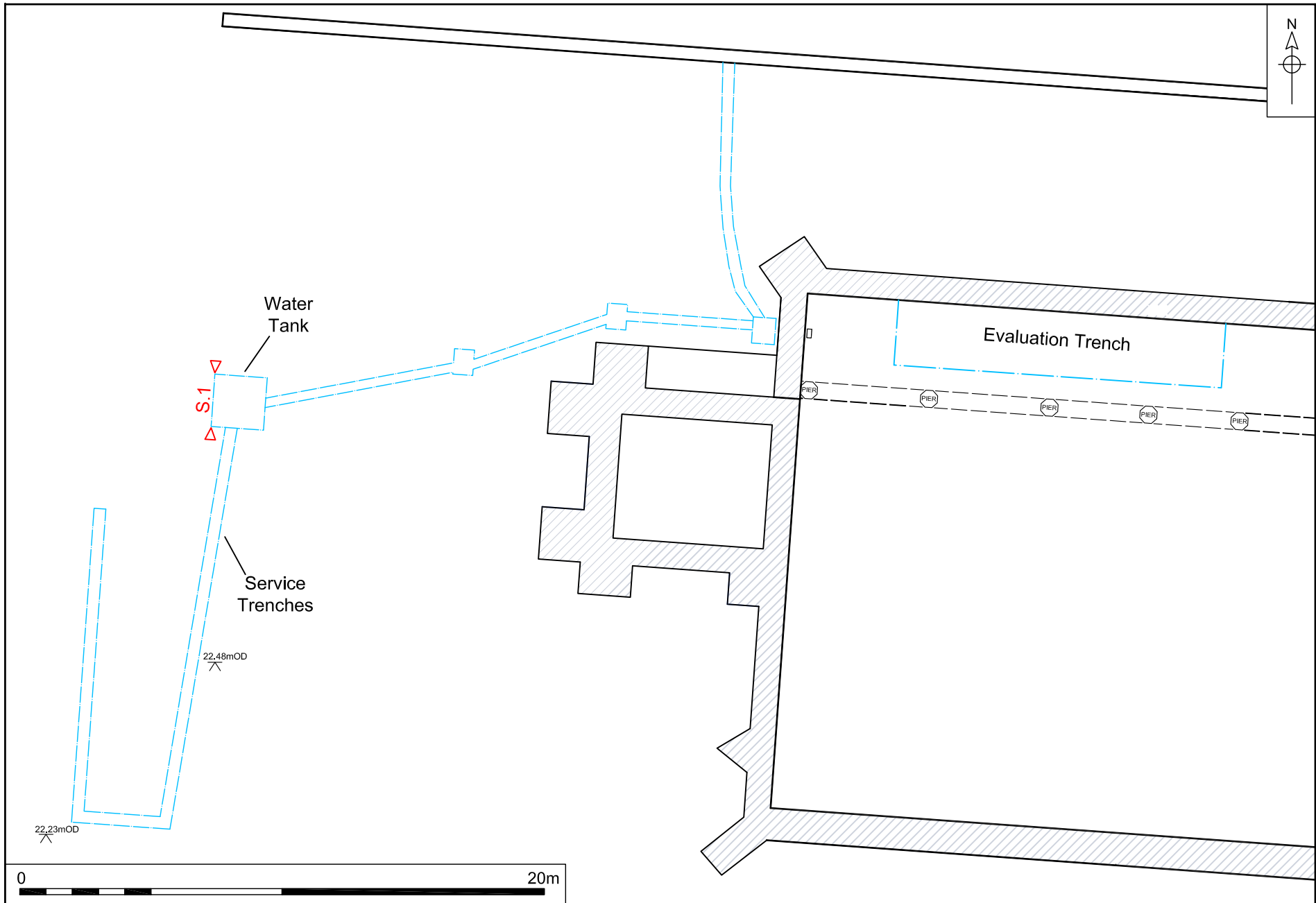


Figure 2. Location of excavations. Scale 1:200

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

This programme of archaeological works was designed to mitigate the impacts of the proposed works in line with the Archaeological Brief. Where archaeological remains were identified, and could not be preserved *in situ*, the impact of the scheme was minimised by appropriate levels of archaeological excavation and recording. The mitigation strategy included a watching brief to record any archaeological remains exposed during the works and reporting of those findings.

The excavations took place in several stages (Fig. 2) with an initial trench being hand-excavated to a depth of 0.93m against the external side of the western wall of the northern aisle. A hole was then cut through the wall below ground level to allow the installation of a waste pipe into the interior of the church. Several pavement tiles were removed from the interior floor surface to allow the excavation of a small hole on the interior of the church through which the pipe could rise. Several weeks later further external excavations were undertaken at the west end of the church this time with the use of a 5 tonne tracked excavator to dig drainage runs from the previously excavated trench at the west end of the north aisle westwards at a depth of 0.5m and width of 0.4m to intersect with a trench 2m<sup>3</sup> into which a water tank was to be installed some 12m from the tower. The depth and potential for archaeological remains within this latter trench prompted discussion and agreement with the contractor that excavation take place in spits of no greater than 150mm at a time. A soakaway drain was then excavated to the south for a length of 15.5m before it turned west and then immediately north back towards the water tank for a further 12m terminating some 5m to its south-west. Throughout its length the trench maintained an average depth below ground of 0.7m and a width consistent with those previously excavated. Finally a short stretch of trench similar in dimension was dug from the north aisle to the edge of the northern church yard wall for the installation of a clean water pipe.

In February 2011 a small trench measuring 12.5m by 2.5m was excavated within the northern aisle of the church after lifting of the floor in this area revealed archaeological deposits *in situ*. A softer area of ground just to the north of the northern arcade was investigated prior to laying new lime-crete flooring. The resulting test pit measured 1.15m by 1.3m and reached a depth of 0.95m.

All works were undertaken under conditions of constant archaeological monitoring with deposits recorded using NAU pro forma and plans and sections prepared where appropriate. Both digital and monochrome photography was used.

Human skeletal remains encountered during the course of the works were collected and (in agreement with the PCC and NHES) were not processed and on completion of the project are to be returned to the church for reburial.

Modern and late post-medieval ceramic building material that was identified on site was not retained and no other finds were encountered.

No deposits suitable for environmental samples were present.

A benchmark with a height of 24.43mOD located on the south eastern buttress of the chancel was used to obtain levels.

The weather was variable with much of the work taking place with snowy ground conditions however this did not unduly hinder the monitoring work.

## 5.0 RESULTS

### External

In all external excavations (service trenches, water tank and manholes) a dark grey brown topsoil (03) reached a depth of 0.30- 0.35m overlying a mid grey brown silty sand subsoil (04) containing numerous fragments of human bone. The only variation to this was in the hand excavated portions of the work just to the west of the northern aisle wall where a layer of crushed chalk (02) probably of modern date lay just beneath a modern topsoil (01), dividing it from deposit (03) below (Fig. 2, Plate 1).



Plate 1. North-facing section of pit at west end of north aisle

Only within the trench excavated for the water tank did deeper excavations take place and here the subsoil could not be distinguished from any lower deposits despite careful observation. However below a depth of c.1m significant quantities of disarticulated human bone were encountered perhaps suggesting a charnel pit. The majority of these bones were long bones although fragments of pelvis, cranium and other smaller bones were also recovered. Interestingly many of the long bones appeared to be aligned east west as if deliberately placed.

Natural sands were encountered at a depth of 1.35m below present ground surface level at the eastern end of the trench rising slightly to the west.

A total of three cuts were identified near the base of the trench but were only observed in section (Plate 2). The first was located in the north-facing section which revealed itself after the section collapsed during machining to expose skull [09]. The depth and instability of the edges did not allow for greater investigation beyond the retrieval of the skull which had been dislodged from its original location. As such it was not possible to determine if it was in fact a grave cut but the position of the skull at the east end of the feature suggests it wasn't. The second and third cuts were revealed in the east-facing section as the machine removed the last of the spoil from this edge (Fig. 3 plan and section 1).

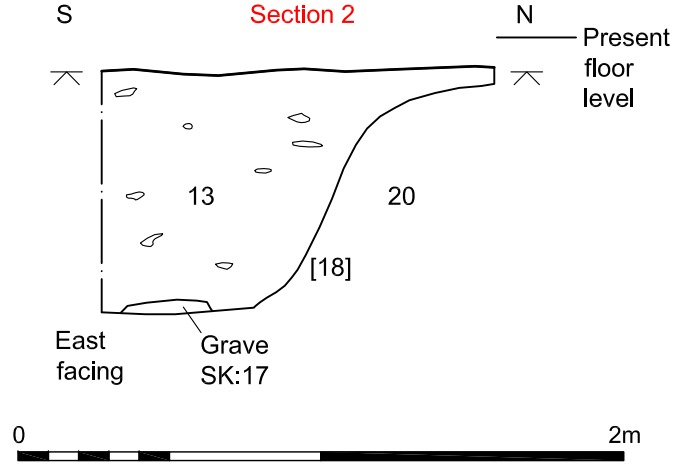
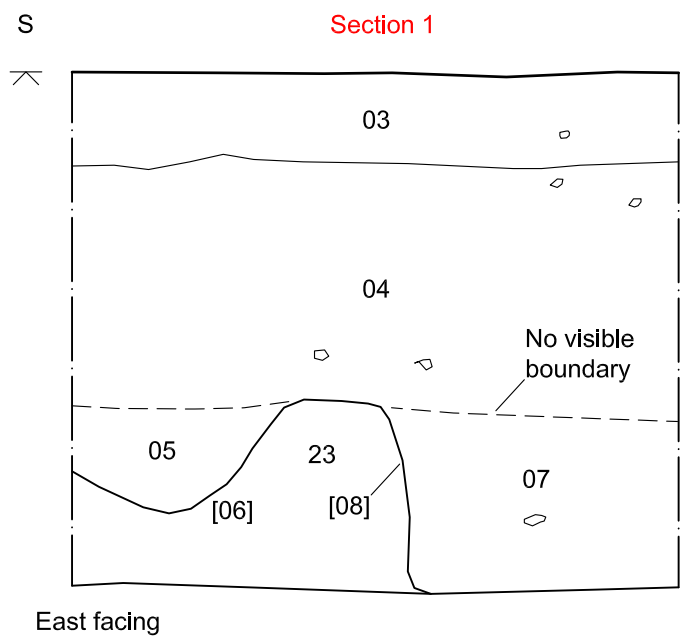
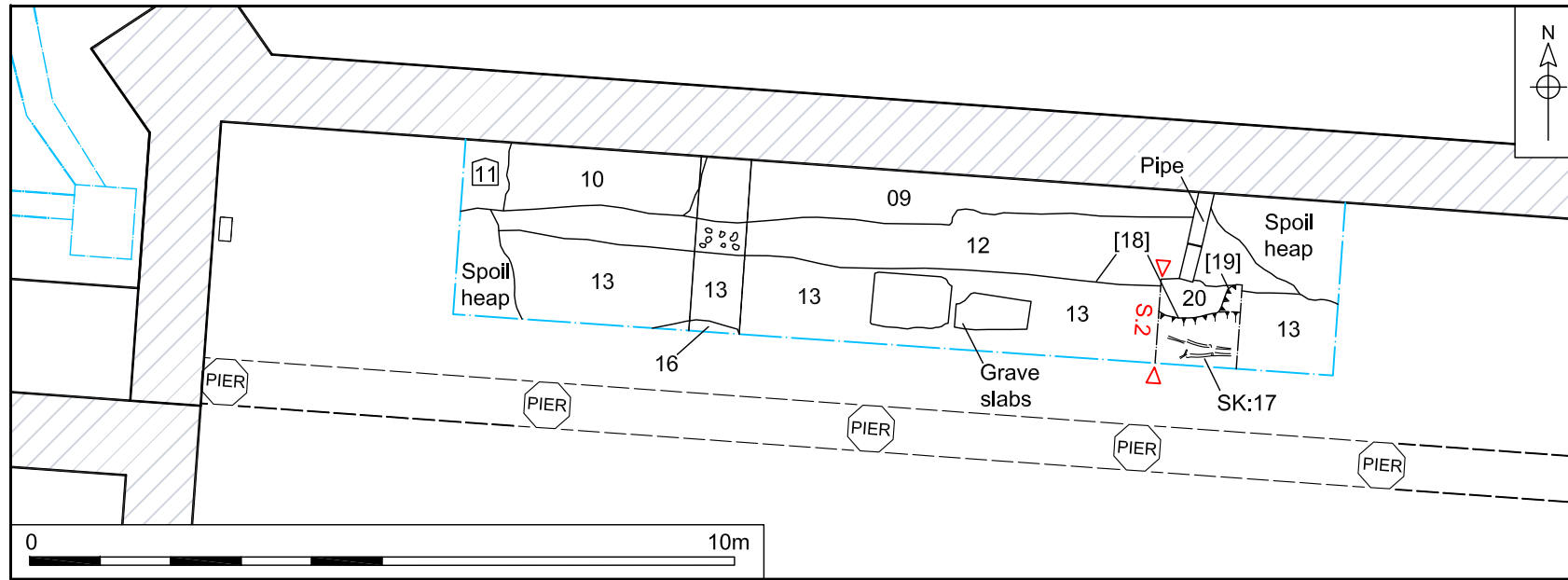


Figure 3. Plan of Trench within the church and sections 1 and 2. Scale 1:100 and 1:25



Plate 2. East-facing section of water tank pit, 1m scale

Cut [06] was located at its southern end and may have been the very eastern edge of a grave, although no bones were exposed. It had a width of 0.65m and reached a maximum depth of 0.36m. Its fill (05) could not be distinguished from the subsoil above. At the northern end of this same section cut [08] could be seen to truncate the natural sands almost to the base of the trench giving it an apparent depth of 0.6m. Its full width could not be established as it continued beyond the northern limits of the trench but it must have exceeded 0.98m perhaps making it a little wide for a grave cut (but it could be oblique). As with the previous cuts the fill was indistinguishable from the subsoil although several fragments of human bone were retrieved from it.

### **Internal**

The removal of the wooden floor in the northern aisle and its associated brick dwarf walls revealed several archaeologically significant deposits visible in plan after light cleaning had been carried out (Plate 3). Alongside the northern aisle wall a compacted layer of orange sands and gravels (09) reminiscent of a floor surface extended south from the eastern limits of the trench to within 3.4m of the southern end where it abutted a lime mortar and flint rubble deposit (10) which in turn abutted a flint and lime mortar footing (11) partially visible at the southern end of the trench (Fig. 3 plan). All of these deposits were confined to the north of a dark brown silt deposit (12) up to 0.95m wide containing numerous flints and extending the full length of the trench. To the south of this a very soft mid yellow brown silty sand (13) ran the full length of the trench and extended beyond the limits of excavation to the south, east and west. Two fragments of grave slab, one with an inscription had been laid above this deposit although they were almost certainly repositioned from an earlier setting (Plate 4). The inscription although heavily eroded appeared to end with

‘July the 5 days 1663’



Plate 3. Post excavation view of trench, facing east, 1m scale in fore ground

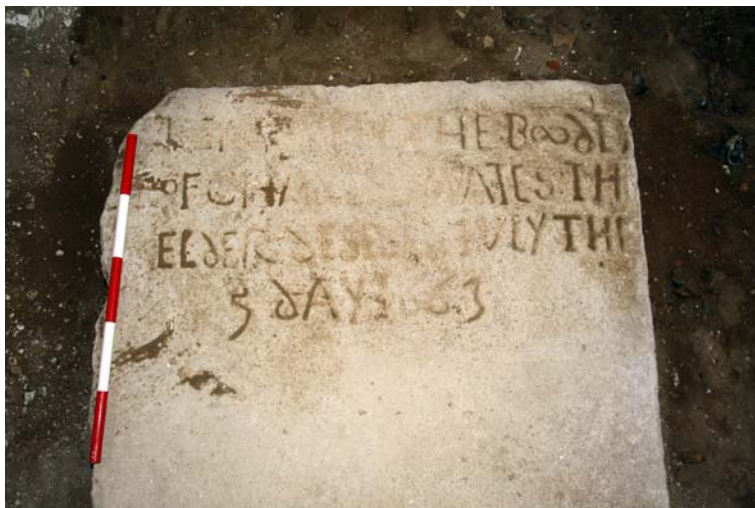


Plate 4. Grave stone inscription, 0.5m scale

A narrow sondage 0.6m wide towards the western end of the trench and across its full width indicated that deposit (12) may perhaps have been a wall foundation given the density of flints however the limited depth of this sondage (0.1m) failed to allow its relationship to deposits (09) and (13) to be established (Plate 5).



Plate 5. Western sondage through internal excavation, 1m scale with 0.5m scale in foreground

At the southern end of this sondage and only just protruding from the edge of the section clay-lined shallow pit [15] was recorded cutting into the top of deposit (13) (Plate 6).

Its width exceeded that of the sondage but its length was not established as it appeared to continue south beneath the nave floor. The clay (14) had clearly been exposed to a heat source as it varied from orange to pink in colour but no ash or charcoal deposits survived as further evidence for such a fire. The hollow had been filled with a soft powdery mid grey brown silt (16) on which the floor had been laid.



Plate 6. Clay-lined pit at west end of trench, 0.5m scale

Concern as to the nature of deposit (13) and its suitability to support a solid floor resulted in an agreement that a small test pit be excavated through it towards the eastern end of the trench. This pit was located across the site of a ceramic heating vent pipe which had partially truncated deposit (13) however the soils below remained un-disturbed and the pit was excavated to a depth of 0.95m below the present ground surface (Plate 7).



Plate 7. Sondage at east end of trench, 1m scale

At the base of the pit a grave (Sk:17) was uncovered on an east-west alignment, the upper body being beyond the edge of the test pit to the west (Plate 8).





Plate 8. Grave Sk:17 at base of sondage, 0.5m scale

It lay within cut [18] of which only the northern edge was identified running parallel to the length of the church with a width of at least 1m. This northern edge had been cut at an angle of approximately 80 degrees, becoming shallower in angle towards the base (Fig. 3 section 2).

A second cut [19] was partially visible within the north-eastern corner of the excavated pit, although this was recorded only in plan due to the impracticalities of excavating such a small area in a pit of such limited size. Both [18] and [19] cut through a dark grey brown sandy silt (20) of a much firmer consistency than deposit (13) and reminiscent of a graveyard soil; it was on this material that deposit (12) appeared to have been laid. Filling cut [18] and possibly [19] (as no distinction could be made between them) was deposit (13) from which numerous pieces of post-medieval tile and disarticulated human bone were retrieved. Interestingly after excavation of deposit (13) it was noted that the very end of another cut [21] was visible within the north facing elevation (Plate 7). This cut was very square with vertical sides to a depth of 0.6m and a flat base 0.65m long but continuing beyond the limits of excavation to the west. It did not however extend into the excavated area beyond the section. Cut [21] was infilled with a dark grey brown sandy silt, almost as soft as deposit (22) and into its upper surface had been cut the trench for the ceramic heating vent.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The excavations within the area of the graveyard revealed as might be expected a significant quantity of human bone. From the topsoil small fragments of disarticulated human bone were recovered consistent with a well mixed organic graveyard soil, however below a depth of 1m more substantial disarticulated bones were encountered. Although no *in situ* graves were identified the number of long bones recovered and size of the northernmost cut suggests the re-interment of previously-disturbed graves most likely within a charnel pit. The lack of dating evidence and uniformity of the soil profile makes it difficult to suggest a date for this event however one possibility is that they might relate to one of the phases of construction at the site, an event which required their removal to a different area of the graveyard.

Inevitably the limited scope of the investigations undertaken within the church below the floor of the north aisle has raised more archaeological questions than it answered. It would appear that at some point in the post-medieval period probably in the 18th century or later a large trench of undetermined width was excavated parallel to and just to the north of the northern arcade. This trench seems to have significantly truncated a graveyard soil to a depth of about a metre whereupon encountering *in situ* burials excavation ceased. The purpose of such a trench is not clear but it was then backfilled with soft fine silty sands to bring it back up to level ready for the laying of a wooden floor. The deposits immediately to the north of this sondage may have been related to an earlier phase of the church with the compacted gravel suggesting a floor surface and the concentration of flints and dark brown silt along the centre of the trench perhaps relating to a wall footing. This picture is much the same at the western end of the trench with a flint and mortar footing in evidence below the piscina. The clay-lined shallow pit is of particular interest here given its presence within a church but its function can only be guessed at given its limited exposure. The casting of church bells in clay-lined pits is known to have taken place within church buildings but those features are much more substantial.

## ***Acknowledgements***

The author would like to thank the contractors on site who helped him undertake the work and Ruth Blackman who enabled the project to proceed.

David Dobson created the graphics and produced the report and Jayne Bown edited it.

## ***Bibliography***

- |                                  |      |   |
|----------------------------------|------|---|
| BGS                              | 1985 | <i>Solid Geology Sheet 52N 00 Pub BGS</i>   |
| BGS                              | 1991 | <i>Quaternary Sheet 52N 00 Pub BGS</i>  |
| Communities and Local Government | 2010 | <i>Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment: TSO, Norwich</i> |

## Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Deposit			Dark grey brown topsoil	Modern
2	Deposit			Chalky crush layer	Modern
3	Deposit			Dark grey brown topsoil	Unknown
4	Deposit			Mid grey brown sandy silt	Unknown
5	Deposit			Mid grey brown sandy silt	Unknown
6	Cut	Grave		Possible grave cut	unknown
7	Deposit			Mid grey brown sandy silt	Unknown
8	Cut	Charnel Pit		Cut of charnel pit	Unknown
9	Deposit			Compacted orange sands and gravels	Unknown
10	Deposit			Lime mortar and flint rubble layer	Unknown
11	Masonry			Flint wall footing	Unknown
12	Deposit			Dark brown silt	Unknown
13	Deposit			Mid yellow brown silty sand	Post-medieval
14	Deposit			Clay lining	Unknown
15	Cut	Pit		Clay-lined pit	Unknown
16	Deposit			Mid grey brown powdery silt	Unknown
17	Skeleton			Skeleton	Unknown
18	Cut	Construction		Cut of linear feature	Unknown
19	Cut	Unknown		Cut of unknown feature	Unknown
20	Deposit			Dark grey brown sandy silt	Unknown
21	Cut	Unknown		Modern rectangular cut	Modern
22	Deposit			Dark grey brown sandy silt	Modern
23	Deposit			Natural yellow orange sands	Unknown

## Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Feature type	Number
Modern	Unknown	1
Unknown	Unknown	1
	Construction cut	1
	Pit	2
	Grave	1