

CDBE15



**Dunstable Baptist Church, St. Mary's Gate, Dunstable**

**Archaeological Monitoring**

*Prepared for Dunstable Baptist Church*



**HEADLAND**  
ARCHAEOLOGY Ltd

## PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET

<i>Client</i>	Dunstable Baptist Church
<i>National Grid Reference</i>	TL 01801 21681
<i>Parish:</i>	Dunstable
<i>Council:</i>	Central Bedfordshire
<i>OASIS ref.:</i>	Headland4 - 210198
<i>Archive will be deposited with:</i>	Luton Culture
<i>Accession Number</i>	LTNMG1146
<i>Project Manager:</i>	Joe Abrams
<i>Author:</i>	Steve Thomson
<i>Fieldwork:</i>	Steve Thomson
<i>Graphics:</i>	Caroline Norrman
<i>Schedule Report</i>	June 2015

*Signed off by*



*Joe Abrams*

*Date: 14 July 2015*

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# DUNSTABLE BAPTIST CHURCH, ST. MARY'S GATE DUNSTABLE

## Archaeological Monitoring

*Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd undertook archaeological monitoring of groundworks associated with the construction of an extension on land at Dunstable Baptist Church, St. Mary's Gate, Dunstable in order to identify and record any archaeological remains impacted on by the development. During the course of the investigations two post-holes of probable post-medieval date were identified along with evidence of deposits and structural remains associated with the original church which was demolished in 1849. A post-medieval burial was also partially exposed within the foundation trenches and excavated and removed for assessment and reburial.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Central Bedfordshire Council granted planning permission for extensions and alterations to Dunstable Baptist Church (CB/14/00120/FULL). This involved groundworks associated with the construction of an extension on the south-western elevation of the church hall. A condition attached to the permission for the extension (Condition 4) required the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation to be undertaken during the excavation of foundation trenches.

A Heritage Assessment was produced by Headland Archaeology (2011) in support of the planning application. This highlighted the potential for archaeological remains associated with the Roman, Saxon and medieval development of Dunstable to survive, alongside graves (both marked and unmarked) associated with the Baptist church. These could potentially be impacted on by the development.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (Headland 2015) was commissioned by Dunstable Baptist Church and approved by the Central Bedfordshire Archaeological Officer (AO).

## 2 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site is located close to the centre of Dunstable in Bedfordshire (Illustration 1). It is positioned to the south-west of the junction of the High Street and West Street, just to the south of 'St Mary's Gate'. It is centred at TL 01801 21681.

The site comprises the Grade II listed chapel and attached church hall and bookshop, set within a small churchyard. It covers an area of approximately 970m<sup>2</sup>. Extant grave stones occupy the ground to the northern and eastern sides of the existing church.

The area of the proposed extension and the site generally is bounded by brick walls, with car-parking beyond this on all sides.

Underlying geological deposits are Holywell Nodular Chalk and the New Pit Chalk Formations dating to the Cenomanian to Turonian periods. No superficial deposits have been mapped (British Geological Survey website; <http://www.bgs.ac.uk>).

The site lies on flat land, at around 150mOD. The area immediately to the south and west of the church buildings, where the extension is to be constructed, displays a slight bank in the ground sloping towards the western walls of the existing building and a clay brick path.

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A Heritage Assessment was compiled by Headland Archaeology (2011) which details the initial historic and archaeological background of the development area. Further research on the history of the church, utilising records and sources held at the Bedford and Luton Archive and Record Service, was undertaken for this report. Unfortunately, the records relating to the Old Baptist Church, Dunstable have not been deposited with the county archive (Duty Archivist pers. Comm.).

The Icknield Way, which may have been a prehistoric trackway, runs east-west just to the north of the site, along the line of West Street / the A505. No archaeological remains of prehistoric date have been found in proximity to the site, although Palaeolithic and Neolithic flint artefacts, cremations, barrows, and other prehistoric earthworks have been uncovered in Dunstable more widely (Doubleday & Page 1904: 145-173).

Dunstable was a Roman town (Durocobrivis). The development is positioned within the area of Roman settlement - to the south-west of the crossroads of the Icknield Way (West Street) and Watling Street (High Street). Excavations close to the site have revealed evidence for Roman settlement, including the 1970s excavation at St Mary's Street (30m to the north-west) which uncovered a 2<sup>nd</sup> century well and cess-pit (MBD11273); and at Friary Field (50m to the south) where a range of Roman remains, including a cemetery, were uncovered (MBD11284).

No Saxon remains have been uncovered close to the site. However, there is evidence that there was

some continuation of occupation of the town into the Saxon period, as evidenced by the discovery of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Marina Drive to the west of Dunstable and sunken-featured buildings uncovered in the north-eastern part of the town (Albion Archaeology 2005: 25).

Dunstable does not appear in the Domesday Survey. Any settlement here at that time is thought to have been included under the entry for neighbouring Houghton Regis.

A settlement was in existence in the early medieval period, as a school is recorded in 1100 (VCH vol II: 178) and there are records of a devastating fire in 1213 and then rapid rebuilding into a thriving market town by 1297 (Albion Archaeology 2005: 16).

Archaeological evidence for medieval settlement has been uncovered close to the site including at Chapel Walk and St Mary's Street immediately to the south-east and north-west (MBD11280 and MBD11273). At St Mary's Street, kilns for malting and tile production were identified. The Augustinian Dunstable Priory, founded by Henry I in 1132, was also situated to the east of the site (SAM: 1004676).

The original Dunstable Baptist Church was constructed in 1708, following purchase of land in a field formerly known as St Mary Over. Anecdotal and local tradition holds that a church called St. Mary's existed within the vicinity, though no record of this could be identified.

In 1807 the Church was substantially enlarged, apparently to twice its original size, with a double roof added (Lambourne 1859) and was formally identified as the Eben-Ezer Church. The 1841 Tithe map shows this Church, within a small boundary and located in the extreme northeast corner of St Mary Overs field with an outbuilding to the south of the main structure.

In early 1849, a violent storm severely damaged the roof of the church, which was deemed unrepairable. The original church was demolished and rebuilt on the same site that year. Benson (1986) indicates that at this point a Sabbath school was connected to the Church, though the precise date this was initiated is not identified. The church

was also renamed at this point as The Old Baptist Church, ostensibly to identify it from the Baptist Church on West Street.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1880 shows the existing church building and by 1901 a second detached structure in the vicinity of the present church hall and bookshop is recorded and marked 'Sunday School'. This structure was demolished during the 1990s and the present church hall built at a slight angle to the existing church.

Extracts from Certificates of Burials (Z392/2) indicate the active use of the churchyard as a burial ground during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with burials occurring 2 years prior to the demolition of the first church (1847). In 1861, a document from the Court of Windsor (P72/2/30) directed that no new burial ground should be opened within the parish and the practice of burial should be discontinued at the Baptist Church, with the exception of existing vaults and brick built graves to contain only single inhumations and sealed, with existing family plots only being utilised if the burial was a minimum of four feet deep.

#### 4 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

In general, the purpose of the investigation was to record and enhance understanding of the significance of heritage assets before they are lost (NPPF para 141). This was to be achieved by determining and understanding the nature, function and character of any remains on the site, in their cultural and environmental setting.

The national research context is provided by English Heritage (1991 and 1997) and regionally by Oake et al, *Bedfordshire Archaeology: Research and Archaeology: Resource Assessment, Research Agenda, and Strategy* (2007). The regional research frameworks for the East of England – Brown and Glazebrook's *Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties* (2000), and Medlycott's *Research and Archaeology Revisited: A Revised Framework for the East of England* (2011) will also be considered. Any evidence retrieved during the works will be analysed in light of the objectives contained in these frameworks.

- The aims of the investigation included:
- Establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation in the development area.
- Establishing the relationship of any remains to the surrounding contemporary landscapes.
- Recovering artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region.
- Recovering paleo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

Specifically relevant to the investigation is the topic of non-conformity. This had a strong tradition in Bedfordshire and the study of churches and chapels and the communities that used them have been identified as important research objectives (Edgeworth 2007, 126-7). More pertinently, excavations in towns generally need to focus on issues of post-medieval archaeology as, inevitably, post-medieval remains are those likely to suffer most damage from modern development (Oake et al 2007, 126-127).

To facilitate access for future research and interpretation for public benefit, the resulting archive (finds and records) will be deposited Luton Culture (LTNMG1146).

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Site works

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 with subsequent excavation of the partially exposed burial taking place on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

On identification of in situ human remains, and in consultation with the AO, a licence for the removal of human remains was obtained from the Ministry of Justice (15-0114) and is held within the site archive.

Monitoring was carried out in accordance with the WSI (Headland Archaeology 2015) and involved continuous archaeological observation, investigation and recording during all aspects of groundworks associated with the development.

Initial removal of topsoil deposits was undertaken by a mechanical mini-digger fitted with a flat bladed 0.60m wide bucket. Subsequent foundation trenches and reduction of deposits within the interior of trenches utilised a toothed 0.50m wide bucket.

Hand excavation of the northernmost foundation trench was required due to the presence of a gas pipe and this was observed to the level of natural geological deposits.

Spoil generated from the excavations was monitored and observed for artefactual material which may have indicated the presence of archaeological features.

### 5.2 Recording

All recording was in accordance with the code of practice of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). Deposits identified were assigned unique numbers (context). All recording was undertaken on pro forma record sheets that conform to accepted archaeological standards. All stratigraphic relationships were recorded.

An overall site plan at a scale of 1:50 was produced and a plan of a burial identified produced at 1:10. Section drawings were recorded at 1:10. The site plans were accurately tied in to the National Grid.

A digital photographic record was compiled and a metric scale was clearly visible in record photographs.

Full summaries of records compiled during the course of the fieldwork appear as appendices to this report.

### 5.3 Reporting and Archives

The results of the works are presented below. A summary report has been prepared for submission to the OASIS database (headland4-210198).



There resultant archive will be deposited at Luton museum, accession number LTNMG1146. All archive preparation will be undertaken in accordance with guidelines published by the CIfA on behalf of the Archaeological Archives Forum (July 2007).

## 6 RESULTS

The present topsoil and ground surface extended across the site and measured up to 0.25m deep (001). This was a dark brownish grey sandy clayey silt containing frequent brick and tile fragments, occasional cement and mortar fragments, and modern and blue and white transfer print ceramic.

Sealed by the topsoil was a sandy silty chalk and brick (002) and a sandy clayey silt (003) containing frequent brick, concrete fragments and white glazed ceramic. These deposits represent made ground associated with the construction of the church hall and an associated soakaway.

A subsoil deposit, a light brownish grey clayey silt (004) containing frequent charcoal and chalk fragments and occasional brick fragments, was observed to the west of the foundation trenches. The deposit had been heavily denuded in proximity to the extant church hall building and was greater in depth, up to 0.25m, to the west. Greater survival of the subsoil was observed and recorded to the extreme northwest corner of the development (Illustrations 2 & 4).

Underlying the subsoil was the chalk natural geology (005).

Two post-holes [007, 009] were observed cutting the chalk (Illustration 2). Post-hole [007] was truncated to the east by the foundation cut for the existing church hall and was filled with a dark brown clayey silt (006) within which small white glazed ceramic fragments and ceramic building material fragments were noted. Post-hole [009] was oval in shape and measured 0.49 x 0.36 x 0.06m and was filled with a dark grey clayey silt (008) within which ceramic building material fragments were also noted. These pre-date the construction of the church hall in the 1990s, and may have formed a fence line forming the original boundary of the church or related to the earlier St Mary's Church.

A clay brick paved path (010) overlay a yellow sand setting deposit (011) at the northern end of the foundation trenches. These in turn sealed white and light grey silty clay and chalk (012) and a light brownish grey clayey silt (013) which represented backfilling of a modern gas pipe trench [026].

Below the gas pipe trench was a reddish purple and black gritty silty sand (014). The deposit also comprised heavily vitrified and burnt agglomerate material: glass, brick, nails and blue and white transfer printed pottery (not retained). The deposit represented clearing and debris associated with a fire or burning episode, although no incident of this nature can be identified using documentary records. The presence of modern pottery indicates a relatively modern date for this, and it is likely that it was associated with the demolition of the old church in 1849. Fragments of unburnt human skull were recovered from the deposit indicating that a burial had likely been disturbed and the deposit was not in situ. The deposit was contained within a partially exposed cut [015] measuring 1.50m east-west and 1.30m north-south and was 0.35m deep to the limit of excavation. The cut appeared to extend east beyond the limit of excavation.

Truncated by [015] was a red brick N-S wall foundation (Illustration 3). This comprised a foundation cut [016], bricks (017), and mortar (018). The bricks were visible as headers and measured 0.11m wide and 0.10m deep; and were set within a light yellow brown gritty sand mortar (018) containing charcoal fragments. Six courses of brick survived and the foundation continued north beyond the excavations. The foundation turned eastwards at its southern end (Illustration 2) towards the existing church buildings. This wall may have formed part of the small structure shown on the 1841 Tithe Map in this location.

A red brick wall foundation (022) and foundation trench cut [023] were exposed in the section of the northern foundation trenches (Illustration 4). The observed bricks measured 0.18 x 0.08m and were a mix of headers and stretchers. A mixture of a cement based and yellow brown gritty sand mortar with charcoal fragments formed the bonding material of the bricks. These may have been associated with the original (pre-1849) church.

The foundation cut was partially truncated by the gas pipe trench [026] and a backfill of dark grey clayey sandy silt (024) containing occasional chalk and ceramic building material fragments was observed within the foundation cut.

Lying beneath wall foundation [023] and truncated on its northern side by the burnt deposit [015], was a grave cut [021] (Illustrations 5). The grave was oriented east – west and measured 0.62m x 0.54. A mottled light grey and white clayey silt and chalk fragments (019) formed the fill of the grave. The cut was observed in section to be approximately 0.41m deep and to be heavily disturbed. Skeletal remains (020) were identified and showed a supine burial with arms apparently lying to the side. Much of the bone had decayed away leaving largely fragmentary remains. Coffin nails were identified *in situ* around the edges of the base of the grave cut. This grave would have lain within the graveyard attached to the Chapel. Although it cannot be definitely dated, it may date to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as it appears to have been forgotten about by the time of the construction of the wall foundation [023].

### 6.1 Finds

by Julie Franklin

The finds assemblage numbered one clay pipe stem and a handful of nails. The nails all bear traces of mineralised wood, a feature commonly seen on coffin nails, where the wood has decayed in contact with the iron. A minimum of eight nails are represented, all with T-shaped heads. They are probably of fairly recent date. The clay pipe stem has a narrow bore and is 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 6.2 Bone Assessment, David Henderson

Human Remains: The fragmentary remains of a single skeleton were recovered from cut [021]. Parts of the skull, humeri and scapulae were present *in situ* along with parts of a rib. A further rib fragment was recovered from the grave backfill (019) and the skull fragments from (014) were shown to join with the *in situ* skull. The individual was an adult female, of slight build, probably under about 35 years-of-age at death. No significant pathological lesions were observed. Fragmentation and distortion of the bone by earth-pressure precluded obtaining any standard measurements.

Faunal Remains: A small assemblage of bone was recovered by contractors excavating a service trench on site. All the material was faunal, representing sheep/goat, cattle, horse and domestic fowl. Some butchery marks and evidence of chewing by dogs was recorded. The dimensions of some of the sheep and chicken bones suggest a date after the agricultural improvement of the late-18<sup>th</sup> Century.

### 6.3 Discussion

There was no artefactual material of any earlier date than the post-medieval period.

The evidence for the earliest activity on site comprises the two post-holes. These are likely to be associated and related to some form of boundary or fence line. It is probable that these are of a relatively early post-medieval date and may have defined the boundary of the early church yard and land. Equally, these may have been associated with land division within St. Mary Overs field prior to the purchase of the land for the construction of the original Baptist church. Investigation of maps can neither confirm nor refute interpretations.

The grave (020) was truncated by the cut associated with the burnt material and underlay the wall foundation [023]. This suggests that the burial predates the demolition of the original church in 1849. This is supported by the fact that burials were not carried out after 1861. The burial may date to the earlier part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as it may have been an unmarked grave, or at least had become lost to knowledge at the time of the construction of the wall foundation [023]. It also remained unknown in 1849 at the time of the demolition of the old and construction of the new church,

The red brick wall foundation [023] appears to be associated with elements of the original (pre-1849) church. In contrast, the wall foundation [016] was relatively insubstantial and so may instead have related to a more ephemeral structure added on, or additional to, the original church building. It may potentially be connected with the small structure indicated on the 1841 Tithe map.

The heavily burnt debris within cut [015] is related to a fire, and may represent an episode of deliberate burning associated with the clearing and demolition of the original church in 1849.

### 6.2 Conclusions

The archaeological watching brief recorded remains associated with the post-medieval chapel and graveyard, with no earlier remains being uncovered. These included a single grave, wall foundations associated with earlier incarnations of the church, two post-holes which would have formed a fence-line or property boundary, and burnt debris related to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding of the church. The table below outlines these heritage assets, and their significance.

Table 1: Significance of Heritage Assets

Description of Heritage Asset	Feature Number/s	Significance of heritage asset on Local, Regional, National, International scale
Post-medieval post-holes	007, 009	Low significance of local interest
Post-medieval burial	020	Low significance of local interest
Post-medieval brick wall foundations	016, 023	Low significance of local interest
Post-medieval burnt debris	015	Low significance of local interest

These are considered to have low significance of local interest. As no further development works are planned, there will be no further impact on these remains beyond what was noted in the watching brief.

Table 2: Impact on Heritage Assets (HA)

HA	Development impact	Significance of heritage asset on Local, Regional, National, International scale	Impact of development on heritage asset (None, Low, Medium, High)
Post-medieval post-holes	Excavation of foundations	Low significance of local interest	High impact

	on trenches		
Post-medieval burial	020	Low significance of local interest	High impact
Post-medieval brick wall foundations	016, 023	Low significance of local interest	High impact
Post-medieval burnt debris	015	Low significance of local interest	High impact

### 9. REFERENCES

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## 10. APPENDICES

### 10.1 Context register

Context no.	Description
001	Dark brownish grey clayey sandy silt. Present topsoil/made ground
002	Light grey and light brown sandy silty chalk and brick - Fill of soakaway
003	Light brownish grey sandy clayey silt - made ground
004	Light brownish grey clayey silt containing frequent charcoal and chalk fragments - Subsoil
005	Chalk - natural geological deposit
006	Dark grey, slightly clayey silt, single fill of [007]
007	Ovoid cut 0.39 x 0.36 x 0.07m uneven base. Post-hole
008	Dark grey slightly clayey silt. Single fill of [009]
009	Ovoid cut, 0.19 x 0.36 x 0.06m, uneven base. Post-hole
010	Clay brick paving - Modern path surface
011	Mid-yellow sand - Levelling/setting deposit for path (010)

012	Mottled white and light grey silty clay and chalk fragments. Levelling/dumped deposit
013	Light brownish grey slightly clayey silt. Levelling/dumped deposit
014	Reddish, purple black silty gritty sand , contains frequent vitrified and burnt material. Demolition levelling Fill of 015
015	Partially exposed cut >1.5m E-W. Probable demolition, clearing cut
016	Linear cut N-S orientation, > 1m N-S, 0.63m deep 0.25m wide. Wall foundation cut
017	Red brick, 0.11m wide, 6 courses surviving. Brick wall foundation
018	Light yellow brown gritty sand, mortar deposit in wall foundation [016]
019	Mottled light grey and white clayey silt and chalk. Fill of grave cut [021]
020	Skeletal remains
021	Grave cut.
022	Red brick, >1m E-W x 0.20m wide x 0.53 deep. 6 courses stretchers visible in section. Wall foundation
023	Linear, E-W orientation >1m long x 0.20 wide x 0.53 deep, vertical sides, wall foundation cut
024	Dark grey, slightly clayey sandy silt. Backfill in foundation cut/levelling
025	Red brick, 0.35m wide x 0.24m deep, 3 courses visible, headers visible in section. Possible wall foundation or brick surface.
026	Linear, E-W orientation , modern gas pipe trench
027	Light brownish grey clayey silt, Fill of gas pipe trench [026]

## 10.2 Photographic Register

Frame no.	Direction	Description
001	N	General view of site prior to commencement of ground works
002	S	General view of site prior to commencement of ground works
003	N	Working shot, commencement of groundworks
004	N	General view 'Topsoil' Strip showing (002) - Soakaway
005	N	Section Southern Trench South facing section 002
006	N	Section Southern Trench South facing section 002
007	NW	General View western trench under excavation
008	E	Cut [007] - Post-Med Postholes
009	N	General view -Reduced area and footings
010	N	Cut [009] - Posthole
011	W	Cut [009] - East facing view
012		Disturbed skull fragments
013		Disturbed skull fragments
014	PLAN	In situ skull 020 - Grave cut [021]
015	PLAN	In situ skull 020 - Grave cut [021]
016	N	Section 003 - South facing

017	S	General view - Foundation trenches - Post Ex
018	N	General view - Foundation trenches - Post Ex
019	E	Section 004 - West facing
020	PLAN	Plan view - Grave cut [021]
021	E	View of grave cut [021] looking east
022	PLAN	Plan view - Grave cut [021]
023	W	View of excavated remains 020 in [021]
024	W	View of excavated remains 020 in [021]
025	W	View of excavated remains 020 in [021]
026	W	View of excavated remains 020 in [021]
027	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
028	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
029	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
030	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
031	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
032	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
033	PLAN	Plan view of excavated remains 020 in [021]
034	W	Excavated remains 020 in cut [021]
035	W	Excavated remains 020 in cut [021]
036	W	Excavated grave cut Post Removal (020)
037	PLAN	Plan view excavated grave cut [021]
038	PLAN	Plan view excavated grave cut [021]

### 10.3 Drawing Register

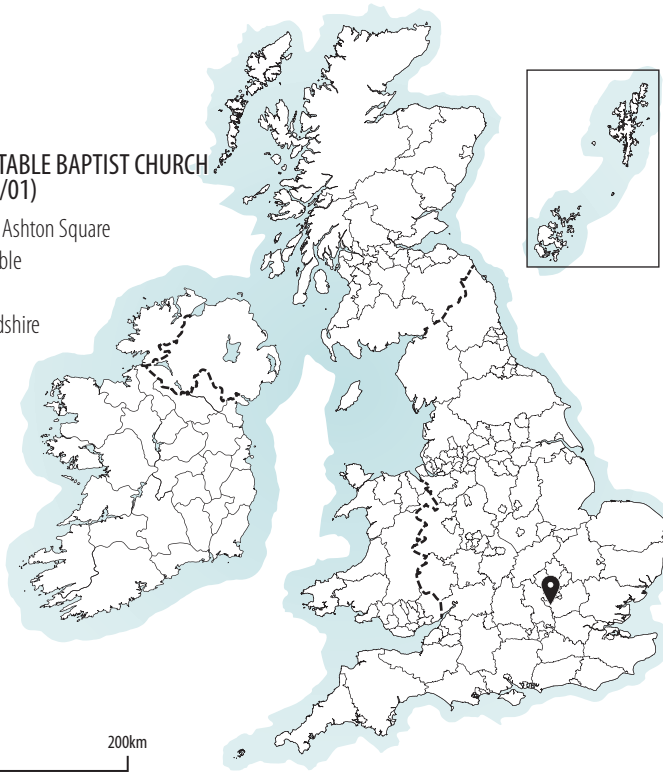
Drawing no.	Plan	Section	Description
001	1:50		Foundation plan and features
002		1:10	Sth facing representative section
003		1:10	Sth facing section, north foundation trench
004		1:10	West facing section north foundation trench
005	1:10		Plan of burial (020)

### 10.4 Finds Catalogue

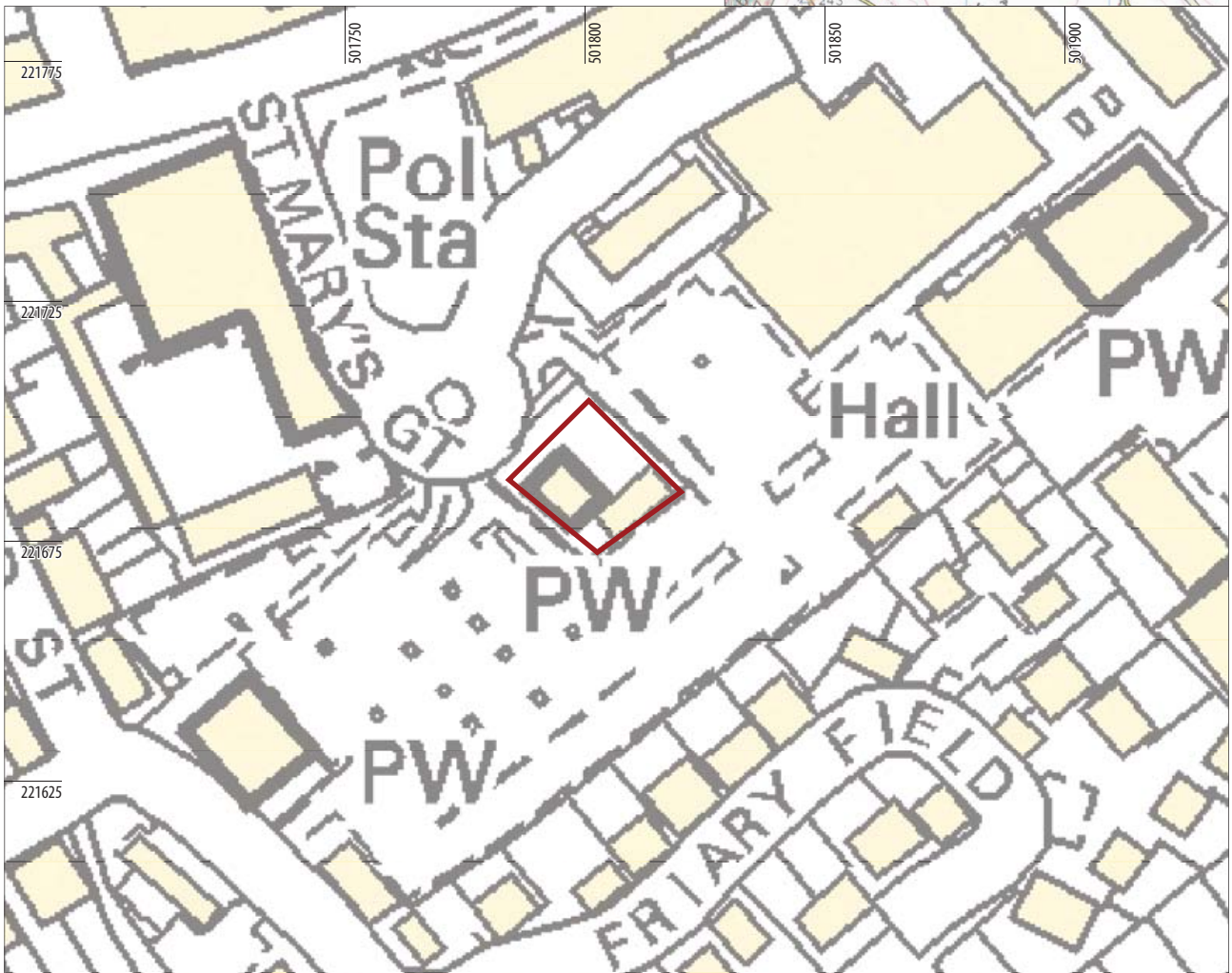
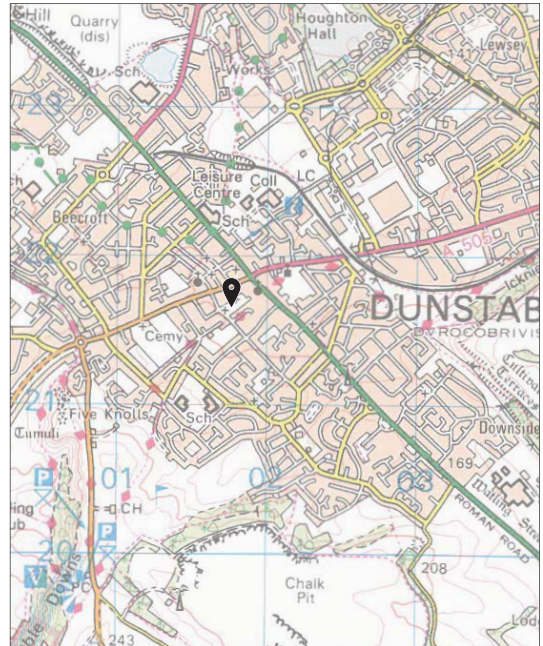
Context	Quantity	Weight (g)	Material	Object	Description	Spot Date	Period
19	1	2	Clay Pipe	Stem	narrow bore stem	19th-e.20th	Mod
19	18	44	Iron	Nails	T-headed nails with remains of mineralised wood, minimum 8 nails represented		Mod
20	1	2	Iron	Nail	shaft, mineralised wood		

**DUNSTABLE BAPTIST CHURCH  
(CBDE/01)**

land at Ashton Square  
Dunstable  
Luton  
Bedfordshire



0 200km



**KEY**

 development boundary

0 50m  
scale 1:1,500 @ A4

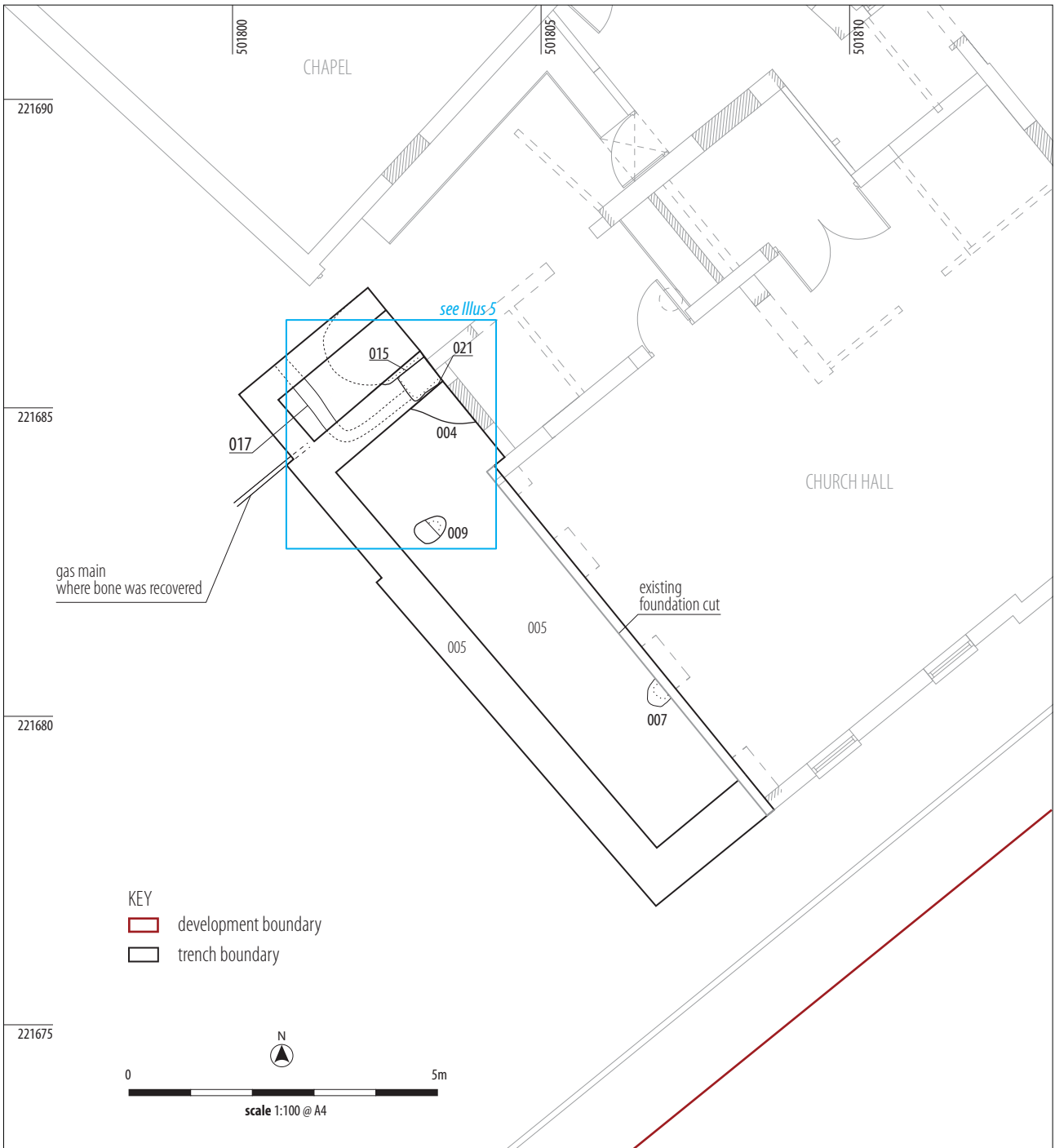


**SOUTH & EAST**

Building 68C, Wrest Park  
Silsoe  
Bedfordshire MK45 4HS  
01525 861 578  
[www.headlandarchaeology.com](http://www.headlandarchaeology.com)

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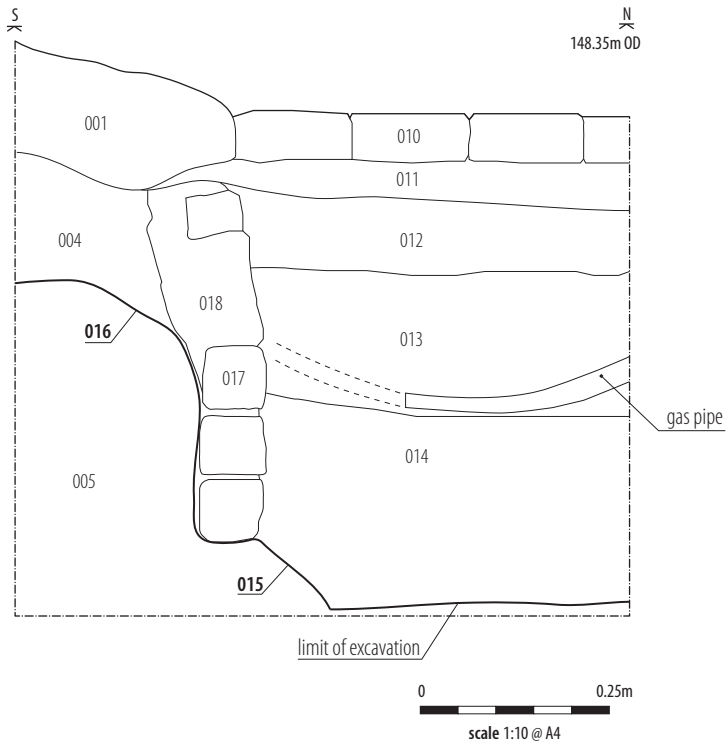
ILLUS 1  
Site location



**ILLUS 2**

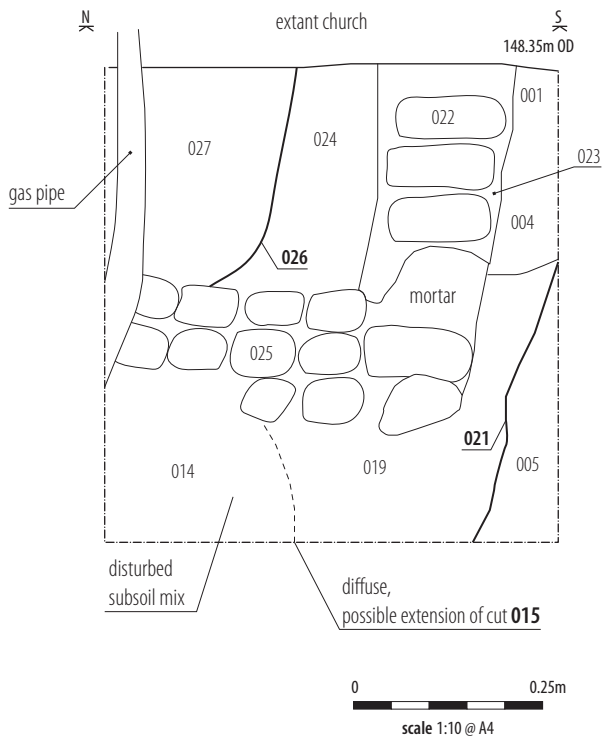
Foundation trench plan showing recorded features





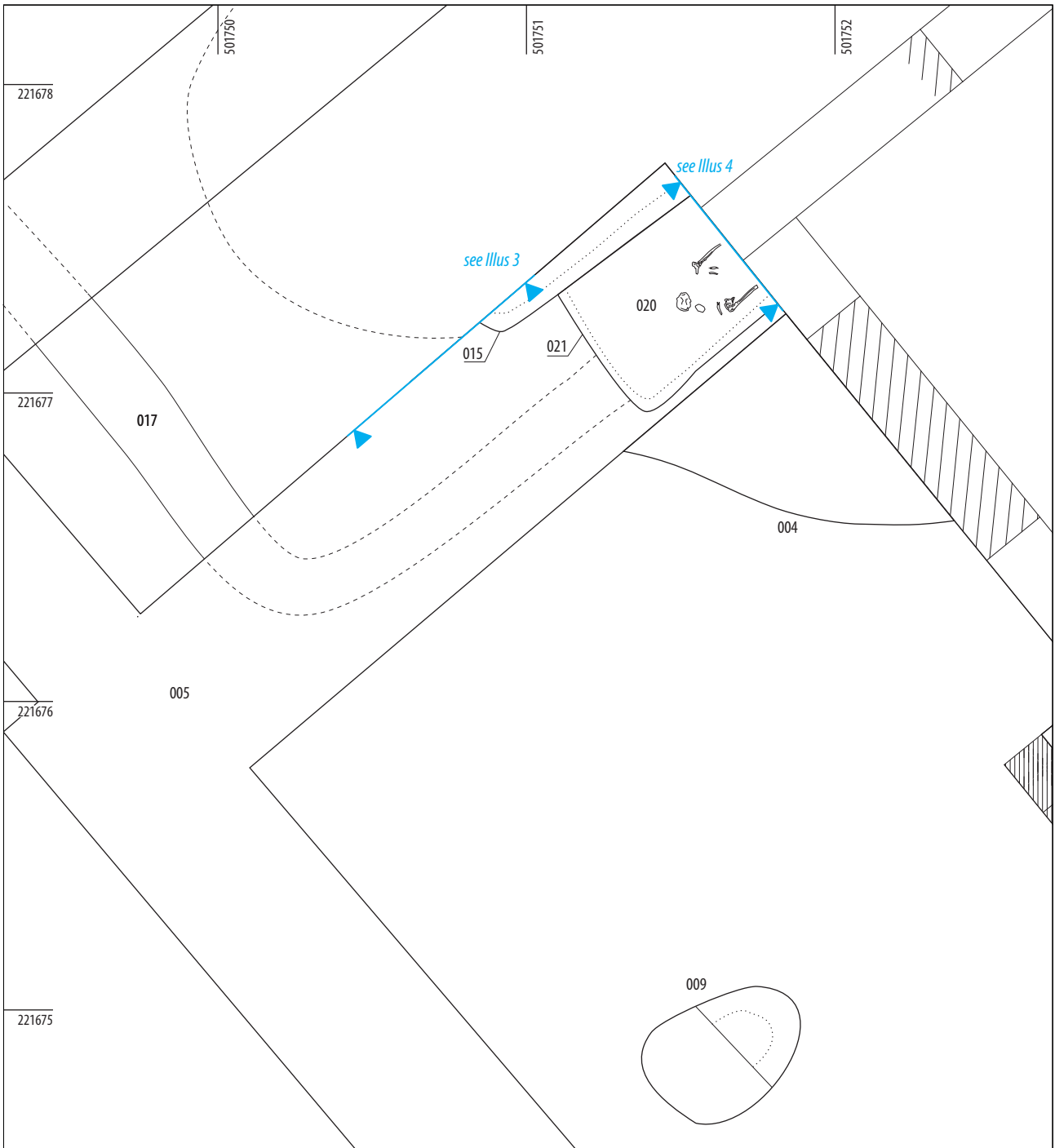
**ILLUS 3**

S facing section from the northern foundation trench

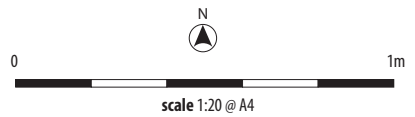


**ILLUS 4**

W facing section showing wall foundations



KEY  
 [ ] trench location  
 [ - - - ] probable feature extension



ILLUS 5  
 Plan of Burial (020)

ILLUS 6

General view of site on completion of groundworks



ILLUS 7

Burial (020)

