Wessex Archaeology

St Michael's Church Heckfield, Hampshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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July 2012



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Prepared for: **St Michael's Church PCC** St Michael's Church Church Lane, Heckfield RG27 0LG

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* I= internal draft e= external draft f= final

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Front cover: St Michael's Church, north side **Back cover:** Headstone of Elizabeth Livington



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by St Michael's Church PCC to undertake monitoring during the excavation of a water supply and drain in association with the establishment of a toilet and refreshment area at the west end of the St Michael's Church, Church Lane, Heckfield (NGR 472271, 160495). The watching brief was carried out between the 2nd and 11th April 2012.

In addition to the discovery of large amounts of disarticulated, isolated human bone four more coherent groups of human bone were located. It is thought that these are groups of bone encountered and relocated by grave diggers, most probably during the 18th century.

Four brick built arched 'caps' for graves were encountered on the south side of the church and the possible edge of a fifth on the north side of the church. These are thought to be decorative 18th century features. Two portions of brick wall exposed on the north side of the church are likely to be a brick lined tomb.

An area of stonework was seen at the base of the now blocked west door thought to be the original threshold. A brick structure adjacent to the north wall of the tower is though to be related to the Victorian boiler-house.



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by St Michael's Church PCC through John Spiers (churchwarden). Wessex Archaeology is grateful to all the assistance that he, Robin Gray (churchwarden) and the contractors from J Shepherd Ltd provided. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank Hannah Fluck (Hampshire County Council) and Richard Whinney (DAC Archaeological Adviser) for their advice and assistance.

The watching brief was undertaken by Naomi Brennan and Simon Flaherty. The report was written and compiled by Naomi Brennan. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Sue Farr. The illustrations were prepared by Ken Lymer.

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Project Background**

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology has been commissioned by John Spiers, Churchwarden at St Michael's Church (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks at St Michael's Church, Church Lane, Heckfield, Hampshire (hereafter 'the Site'), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 472271, 160495 (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 The watching brief was required, as a condition of the faculty granted, during groundworks associated with the installation of a disabled toilet and small refreshment area beneath the tower in a free standing pod at the church. Although the below ground works were limited for the installation itself, a linear soakaway and shallow service trench required excavation within the churchyard.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was carried out on the in April 2012.

1.2 The Site, location and geology

- 1.2.1 Heckfield is positioned close to the county boundary between Hampshire and Berkshire. The village is set in open countryside just off the A32 running from Reading to Hook.
- 1.2.2 The Site comprises a sub-rectangular parcel of land of approximately 0.1 hectares (**Figure 1**) and is bounded by Highfield House to the south, Church Lane to the north and east and open fields to the west.
- 1.2.3 The church is located on a spur of high ground to the south of the village. The underlying geology of the Site is recorded as Bagshot sands.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 1.3.1 The village is first recorded in Domesday as Effell. The church, mill and a fishery are recorded.
- 1.3.2 The church itself is Grade II* Listed and although much restored in the 18th century, is 13th century in origin and is considered to have been built on the site of an earlier church. The western tower, north aisle and north chapel were all added in *c.* 1500. Full restoration of the church was undertaken in 1877 which reduced the width of the aisle and included a new arcade.
- 1.3.3 To the immediate south-west of the church, Highfield House (Highfield Park) is positioned and comprises an 18th century dower house for Stratfield Saye, and is considered to occupy the site of the original manor house. Heckfield House (16th century) is adjacent to the church and shown with an outbuilding and a number of cottages on the Tithe map of 1840.

1.3.4 A number of sites and finds are also recorded on the Hampshire Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record in the wider vicinity. To the north of the Site excavations at The Grove by the Hampshire Field Club identified a row of stakeholes and pottery of Bronze Age and Iron Age date. In addition to the north-east of the village, a rectilinear Iron Age enclosure is recorded from aerial photographs and further possible Romano-British enclosures have been transcribed from aerial photography during a review to the north of the Site

1.4 Aims and Objectives

- 1.4.1 The aims of the watching brief were:
 - To determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains, and should remains be found to be present to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard.
 - To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
 - To determine or confirm the approximate extent of the remains.
 - To determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains.
 - To prepare a report on the results of the watching brief

2 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1.1 The full detailed methodology of the archaeological works was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (Wessex Archaeology 2012), and this is summarised below:
- 2.1.2 All archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* record sheets with a unique numbering system for individual contexts. Archaeological features and deposits were hand-drawn at either 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. Monitored works were referenced to the OS mapping.
- 2.1.3 The photographic record was maintained during the watching brief using a digital camera equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images will be undergo managed quality control and curation processes which will embed appropriate metadata within the image and ensure long term accessibility of the image set.
- 2.1.4 Any disarticulated, isolated human remains and associated coffin furniture discovered during the watching brief was collected, photographed to provide a record of its presence and then reburied within the excavation.
- 2.1.5 A unique site code **84650** was allocated to the Site, and was used on all records and finds.

2.2 Best practice

2.2.1 The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the relevant guidance given in the *Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (IfA 2008).

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3 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 Details of individual excavated contexts and features are retained in the project archive. Summaries of the excavated sequences can be found in **Appendix 1**.
- 3.1.2 The monitored works consisted of the service trench for the drain which was situated on the west and southern side of the church and six test pits for the largely mole dug water supply which lay on the north side of the church (**Figure 2**).

3.2 Results

- 3.2.1 A service trench was excavated for the drain and measured between 0.4-0.5m wide. The depth of the trench varied due to the Site topography; initially the starting depth was 0.3m but due to the necessary 'fall' the depth incrementally increased to 1.2m.
- 3.2.2 The service trench (Figure 2) was excavated adjacent to the blocked west door. At this initial starting point, several stone blocks were found (103) which were interpreted as being the remnants of the original door threshold (Figure 2, Plate 1). Two stones were necessarily moved to allow access for the pipe but the rest were left *in situ*. Further stones could be seen beneath the excavated depth.
- 3.2.3 Throughout its length, the trench was cut through a typical graveyard soil, **101**, comprising a humic sandy silt loam. In the proximity of the west door there were only a few disarticulated fragments of human bone however, as the trench passed along the south side of the church in the vicinity of the south door, disarticulated human remains were found in greater numbers. Nevertheless these had all been previously broken and were neither *in situ* nor clearly associated with other fragments. This suggests that previous work in this area has cut through and disturbed burials. It was noted that the gravestones in this part of the churchyard were some of the earlier examples, dating from the mid 18th century. However considering that the church is thought to date from the 13th century it is clear that there must be a considerable number of burials for which no markers remain.
- 3.2.4 As the service trench turned southwards and passed between two headstones, an area of bricks was located forming a cap to a grave, **102**. The adjacent headstone, which faces west, records this as the grave of Elizabeth Livington who died in 1768 (see **back cover**). Other 18th century examples could be seen within the churchyard, again with the inscription on



the adjacent headstone facing west, just under the turf and at a height equivalent with the base of the inscription. Such brickwork dissociated with any brick lined vault beneath is unusual and may be an attempt to imply a more elaborate grave on a cheaper budget (J. McKinley *pers. comm.*). This suggests not only that these 'vaulted caps' are decorative and meant to be seen, but also that they are a local tradition within this area or parish in the 18th century. The cutting of the inscription on the west face of the headstone is deliberate so that the reader would not be putting any undue pressure on the barrelled brickwork of the cap (J. Litten *pers. comm.*).

- 3.2.5 Three further similar brick 'vaulted caps' were located approximately 2m to the south of **102**, comprising **105**, **106**, and **107** (**Figure 2**, **Plate 2**). These were similarly east west aligned and were immediately adjacent to each other. The close proximity of these three, strongly suggests they are a family group. The style and dimension of the bricks used for all four 'vaulted caps' were closely comparable indicating that they are all 18th or early 19th century. Although no markers were *in situ* for **105**, **106**, and **107** there are a number of obviously relocated gravestones against the churchyard wall in this part of the graveyard. A section of all four 'vaulted caps' had to be removed to allow access for the pipe, this was done by hand with the intention of replacing the bricks during the backfilling and reinstatement.
- 3.2.6 Approximately 0.6m below the 'vault cap' **102** was a distinct group of human bone, **104** (**Figure 2, Plate 3**). Initially this consisted of the upper part of a human skull which was thought to be potentially *in situ*, however further excavation located a second skull and two large skull fragments in the near vicinity. Also found was over a dozen brass rivets, some with wood traces adhering. These formed two parallel lines, aligned approximately east–west. A possible cut was also visible on the north side of the group, but no corresponding edge was visible at this depth on the south side. The conclusion was therefore reached that these were remains disturbed by grave diggers excavating Elizabeth Livington's grave, replaced back on top of the coffin before backfilling. The rivets are likely to be from the 18th century coffin below.
- 3.2.7 Another bone group, **108**, was encountered approximately 0.8m below 'vault cap' **107**. This consisted of a skull situated face down, some disarticulated vertebrae and a long bone on the eastern edge of the trench. Three iron nails were also found in close proximity to this group. Such an incomplete and disarticulated collection of bones does suggest that these are bones encountered and relocated during the excavation of later graves. As such they may even represent more than one burial.
- 3.2.8 The final stretch of the service trench was aligned west east in an area of the churchyard where there are currently no visible grave markers, though several lie immediately to the north. Frequent and often complete disarticulated bones were found while digging this part of the service trench. Proportionally the assemblage was dominated by skulls and long bones.
- 3.2.9 Another bone group **109** was encountered midway along the length of the final stretch of the service trench. It consisted of two skulls, one obviously displaced and face down, a large fragment of scapula, one of the larger bones from the foot and bones from the lower arm and leg. A number of iron nails were also discovered as well as an east–west line of rivets. The rivets

are likely *in situ* marking the decorative edge of a coffin and potentially the northernmost skull, which was only partially uncovered, and may also be *in situ*. The rest of the bones, however, are clearly disturbed and relocated from their original position.

- 3.2.10 The final bone group **110** was encountered at the eastern end of the service trench. It consisted of part of the right pelvis, several articulated vertebrae and some possible finger phalanges. A long bone lay slightly to the east but may be unrelated to this group. The presence of articulated vertebrae suggest that this burial may be *in situ*, albeit largely truncated, or it may be that it has been displaced but held together, for example within the same shovelful.
- 3.2.11 Six test pits were monitored on the north side of the church (**Figure 3**). These were all approximately 0.5m wide by 1.0m long and between 0.8-0.9m deep.
- 3.2.12 Both Test Pits 1 and 2 lay within the area of the path. Beneath the path makeup, they encountered a similar graveyard soil to that seen to the south of the church and the occasional piece of disarticulated human bone.
- 3.2.13 Test Pit 3, which was also through the path, encountered two brick built walls, **3003** and **3004**, either side of the test pit (**Figure 3**, **Plate 4**). These are mostly likely either side of a brick lined tomb (though they could conceivably be the walls of two adjacent tombs). The mortar and bricks are similar to those seen in the structures to the south of the church, suggesting a post-medieval date.
- 3.2.14 A small proportion of a brick built structure **4004** was visible in the north-east corner of Test Pit 4 (**Figure 3**, **Plate 5**). This structure is likely to be the south-east of corner of a 'vaulted cap' similar to **102**, **105**, **106** and **107**, seen on the south side of the church. A variation in the graveyard soil **4003** seen within the lower part of the test pit may indicate a less disturbed deposit and proximity to undisturbed natural geology.
- 3.2.15 Nothing structural was encountered within Test Pit 5, which lay just to the west of the path.
- 3.2.16 The final monitored test pit was situated adjacent to the north wall of the west tower. Beneath a very shallow depth of topsoil the edge of a brick floor or edging 6002 was visible in the east facing section of the test pit (Figure 3, Plate 6). This was thought to be related to a Victorian boiler-house that was once situated in this area.

4 FINDS

- 4.1.1 A small quantity of finds was recovered during the watching brief, consisting largely of disarticulated human remains. In accordance with the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2012) these were collected but reburied within the churchyard.
- 4.1.2 The only other finds recovered were all from the graveyard soil, **101**. A fragment of masonry, made of limestone, faced on one side but not diagnostic was found near the tower. Given its location it is probable that this

fragment was discarded during the restoration work here in the 19th century. A post-medieval brown glazed stoneware jar recovered from the upper part of the graveyard soil **101** was likely a receptacle for cut flowers. Both items were left on Site.

4.1.3 The only find retained was a single fragment of medieval or early postmedieval window glass, highly degraded and almost de-vitrified.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 In addition to the discovery of large amounts of disarticulated, isolated human bone four more coherent groups of human bone (**104**, **108**, **109** and **110**) were located. It is thought that these are groups of bone encountered and relocated by grave diggers, mostly probably during the 18th century.
- 5.1.2 Four brick built arched 'caps' for graves were encountered on the south side of the church (**102**, **105**, **106** and **107**) and the possible edge of a fifth on the north side of the church (**4004**). Other examples were visible in the graveyard suggesting these are decorative 18th century features. Two portions of brick wall (**3003** and **3004**) exposed in Test Pit 3 on the north side of the church are likely to indicate a brick lined tomb. Generally the north side of a church contains the poorer burials due to its gloomy aspect, association with the devil and being the 'back' of the church away from the main entrances. Although the main approach and entrance to St Michael's is now on the north side, up until the 19th century, the principal door was on the south side (Page 1911, 44-51) of the church.
- 5.1.3 The stonework **103**, seen at the base of the now blocked west door is likely to be the original threshold. The use of roughly shaped stone suggest that this may relate to the construction of the tower in the early 16th century rather than to the 18th century when much of the tower was rebuilt using brick (Page 1911, 44-51). A brick structure (**6002**) seen in Test Pit 6 adjacent to the north wall of the tower is likely to be related to the Victorian boiler-house.

6 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1.1 No further work is recommended.
- 6.1.2 An OASIS online record http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/ will be initiated and key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators Forms. All appropriate parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to the AHBR. This will include an uploaded .pdf version of the entire report (a paper copy will also be included with the archive).

7 ARCHIVE

7.1.1 The project archive was prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Appendix 3 of *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage* (Walker 1990). The project archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology under the project code **84650**. In due course the complete archive will be deposited with the local museum.

REFERENCES

- English Heritage, 1991, *Management of Archaeological Projects,* English Heritage
- Institute for Archaeologists, 2008, *Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching briefs*

Page, W. (ed.). 1911. A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 4, Victoria County History Series, pp. 44-51 available at: www.british-history.ac.uk

- Walker, K., 1990, *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for Long-term Storage,* UKIC Archaeology Section
- Wessex Archaeology, 2012, *St Michael's Church, Church Lane, Heckfield: Written Scheme of Investigation for a Watching Brief.* Unpublished method statement, report reference: 84650.01



APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT AND TEST PIT SUMMARIES

bgl= below ground level

SERVICE	TRENCH		
Context	Description		Depth (m)
101	Layer	Graveyard soil. Mid brown sandy silt loam. 5% gravel, sub-rounded – sub-angular, <1-6cm. Loose and friable. Humic. Bioturbated. Under grass.	0.00-1.20 bgl
102	Structure	Slightly arched brick cap for grave. Red brick arch (bricks 0.23x0.10x0.07, some arch bricks). 0.8m wide. Pale grey white lime mortar. Rectangular, east – west aligned. Adjacent headstone that of Elizabeth Livington, died 1768.	0.22 high
103	Structure	Threshold of blocked west door. Roughly squared stone blocks. Some traces of pale yellow mortar. Area exposed 0.66m by 0.55m.	0.18+ high
104	Bone group	Relatively intact upper part of a human skull as well as a second more damaged skull and two, possible associated large skull fragments. Also found over a dozen brass rivets, some with wood traces adhering. Possible cut visible on north side of group. Approximately 0.6m below structure 102. Bone group disturbed by grave diggers excavating later graves.	0.78+ bgl
105	Structure	Slightly arched brick cap for grave. Red brick arch (bricks 0.23x0.10x0.07, some arch bricks). 0.7m wide. Pale grey- white/yellow-white lime mortar. Rectangular, east – west aligned. Close proximity to 106 and 107 suggest family group.	0.25 high
106	Structure	Slightly arched brick cap for grave. Red brick arch (bricks 0.23x0.10x0.07, some arch bricks). 0.7m wide. Pale grey- white/yellow-white lime mortar. Rectangular, east – west aligned. Close proximity to 105 and 107 suggest family group.	0.25 high
107	Structure	Slightly arched brick cap for grave. Red brick arch (bricks 0.23x0.10x0.07, some arch bricks). 0.7m wide. Pale grey- white/yellow-white lime mortar. Rectangular, east – west aligned. Close proximity to 105 and 106 suggest family group.	0.25 high
108	Bone group	Skull situated face down, 2 or 3 disarticulated vertebrae and a ?tibia. Approximately 0.8m below structure 107. Bone group disturbed by grave diggers excavating later graves.	1.00+ bgl
109	Bone group	Two visible skulls, two long bones (?tibia fragment and radius), one of the large bones from the foot and a large fragment of scapula. Several iron nails also found and a line of east – west aligned rivets. Bone group disturbed by grave diggers excavating later graves.	1.20+ bgl
110	Bone group	Part of right pelvis, ?finger phalanges and 4/5 articulated vertebrae. ?Left ?humerus lies to the east. An iron (likely coffin) nail in close proximity. Pelvis, vertebrae and finger bones may be part of I situ burial, though may have been displaced. Bone group disturbed by grave diggers excavating later graves.	1.20+ bgl
111	Natural	Natural geology. Pale yellow sand and gravel.	1.00+ bgl

TEST PIT 1						
Length:	1.0m		Width: 0.5m		Max. depth: 0.88m	
Context	Description	n				Depth (m)
1001	Made ground		round/surfacing for path. Fine ts and hardcore. Overlies 1002.	gra	vel underlain by CBM	0.00-0.23 bgl
1002	Layer	rounded	rd soil. Dark grey-brown sandy – sub-angular, <1-7cm. Fairly ted. Some re-deposited natural v	loc	ose and friable. Humic.	

TEST PIT 2						
Length:).9m	Width: 0.5m	Max. depth: 0.80m			
Context	Description	1		Depth (m)		
2001	Made	Made Made ground/surfacing for path. Fine gravel underlain by CBM				
	ground	round fragments and hardcore. Overlies 2002.				
2002	Layer	Graveyard soil. Mid grey-brown sandy clay. 5% gravel, sub-rounded				
		- sub-angular, <1-7cm. Fairly loose and friabl	e. Humic.	bgl		

TEST PIT 3							
Length:	Length: 1.0m Width: 0.6m Max. depth: 0.80m						
Context	Description	n			Depth (m)		
3001	Made ground		round/surfacing for path. Fine gra ts and hardcore. Overlies 3002.	vel underlain by CBM	0.00-0.18 bgl		
3002	Layer		Graveyard soil. Mid grey-brown sandy clay. 5% gravel, sub-rounded – sub-angular, <1-7cm. Fairly loose and friable. Humic.				
3003	Structure	courses	Brick built wall, part of brick lined vault (red brick, 0.23x0.10x0.10). 6 0.05-0.50+ courses exposed. Pale yellow sandy lime mortar. East – west bgl aligned, possibly associated with 3004.				
3004	Structure	courses	ilt wall, part of brick lined vault (red be exposed. Pale yellow sandy lime possibly associated with 3004.		0.30-0.80+ bgl		

TEST PIT 4						
Length:	Length: 0.90m Width: 0.45m Max. depth: 0.80m					
Context	Description	า			Depth (m)	
4001	Topsoil		topsoil. Mid grey-black silty clay. 2% mogeneous. Bioturbated. Humic. Ove		0.00-0.15 bgl	
4002	Layer		Graveyard soil. Mid grey-brown sandy clay. 5% gravel, sub-rounded 0.15-0.50 – sub-angular, <1-4cm. Fairly loose and friable. Humic. Overlies bgl 4003.			
4003	Layer		Mid orange-brown sandy clay loam. 5% gravel, sub-rounded – sub- angular, <1-8cm. 0.50-0.80+			
4004	Structure		art of arched brick cap for grave (red ow-white sandy lime mortar.	bricks 0.23x0.11x0.07).	0.40-0.60 bgl	

TEST PIT 5							
Length: 1.0m			Width: 0.5m	Max. depth: 0.90m			
Context	Context Description						
5001	Topsoil	oil Modern topsoil. Mid grey-black silty clay. 2% gravel, sub-angular, <1-					
	-	4cm. Ho	4cm. Homogeneous. Bioturbated. Humic. Overlies 5002.				
5002	Layer	Graveya	Graveyard soil. Mid grey-brown sandy clay. 5% gravel, sub-rounded 0.25				
	-	- sub-an	gular, <1-6cm. Fairly loose and friable	e. Humic.	bgl		

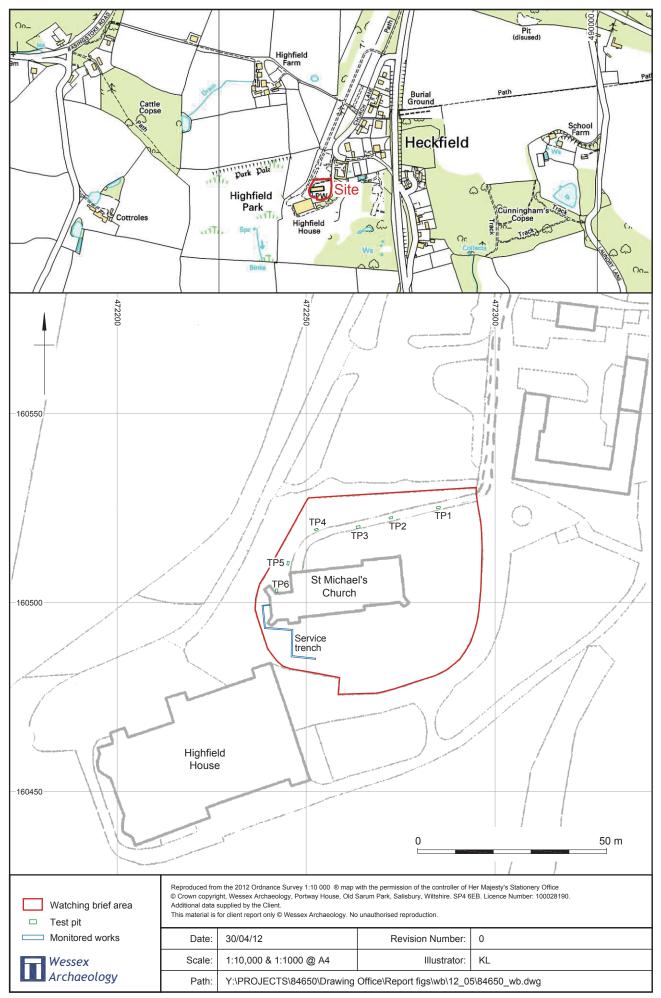
TEST PIT	TEST PIT 6						
Length:	1.0m		Width: 0.5m	Max. depth: 0.80m			
Context	Description	n			Depth (m)		
6001	Topsoil		topsoil. Mid grey-black silty clay. 2%		0.00-0.05		
		4cm. Ho	mogeneous. Bioturbated. Humic. Ove	erlies 6002.	bgl		
6002	Structure	Brick flo	Brick floor or edging (red brick 0.10x0.11, length not visible). No				
		visible b	visible bonding agent. One brick shows signs of over firing. Overlies				
		6003.		-	_		
6003	Layer		rd soil. Mid grey-brown sandy clay.		0.15-0.80+		
	-	- sub-an	gular, <1-6cm. Fairly loose and friable	e. Humic.	bgl		

APPENDIX 2: OASIS RECORD FORM

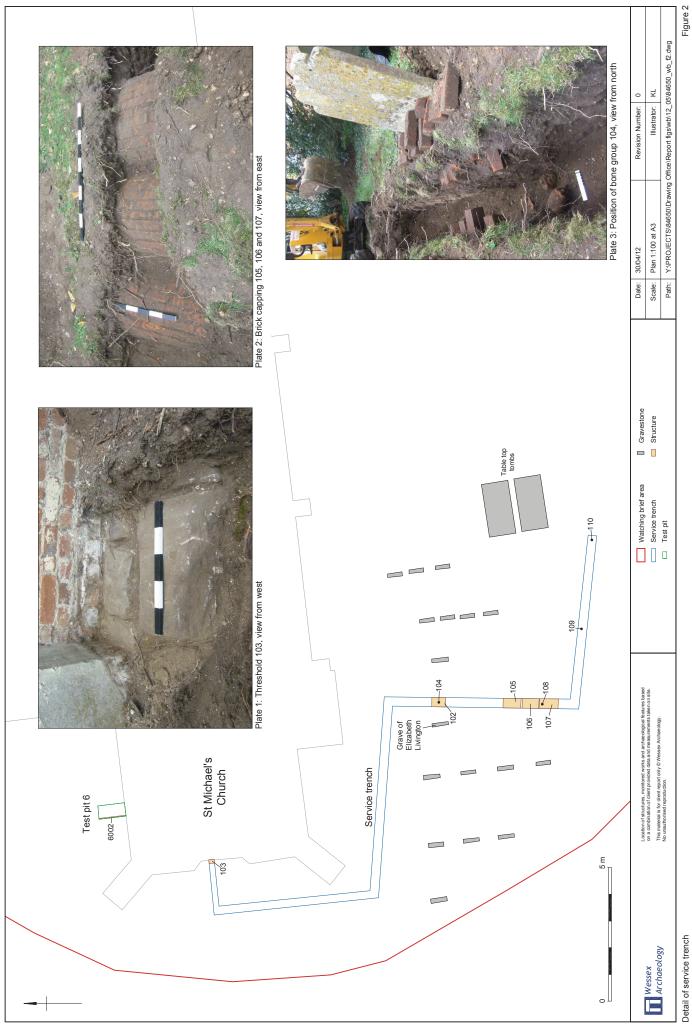
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Location of site and monitored works



Detail of monitored test pits









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