



St. Mary Magdalene Church Eardisley

Archaeological Watching Brief



December 2006
SMR 44133

Hereford Archaeology Series 740

This report is produced by

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS LTD

Manager : A Boucher BSc
Assistant manager: N. Oakey BA MA MIFA

**UNIT 1, PREMIERE BUSINESS PARK,
WESTFIELDS TRADING ESTATE,
FARADAY ROAD, HEREFORD
HR4 9NZ**

Tel. (01432) 364901
Fax. (01432) 364900

for: Eardisley Church Development Committee
c/o Derrick Rowland
Hilltop
Eardisley
Herefordshire
HR3 6LX

Archaeological Investigations Ltd is a trading company wholly owned by the Hereford City and County Archaeological Trust Ltd, a registered charity founded in 1997 to further the work of the City of Hereford Archaeological Committee (founded in 1974) throughout Herefordshire. The Company maintains a core staff with a broad range of expertise, whilst also making extensive use of specialist contract personnel. Besides working on the buried archaeology of Hereford and the country in general, the Company specialises in geophysical survey, historical illustration and the archaeological recording and analysis of standing buildings. Work is usually on a commission basis on behalf of organisations such as English Heritage, the National Trust, and the Landmark Trust. The Company also accepts commissions from local authorities and private developers and provides specialist consultancy advice in relation to archaeology in the planning process and general environmental issues.

Cover picture

North door of west tower, St. Mary Magdalene church, Eardisley

Hereford City & County Archaeological Trust : Company Number 3283805
Registered Charity Number 1060840
Archaeological Investigations Ltd : Company Number 3356931 VAT 692 1750 23

**St. Mary Magdalene Church
Eardisley
(NGR SO 3103 4901)**

Archaeological Watching Brief

Site Work

B. Ward, S. Mayes, L. Craddock-Bennett

Report

L. Craddock-Bennett BSc.

Contents

1. Summary
 2. Introduction
 3. Archaeological and historical background
 4. Aims and Objectives
 5. Method
 6. Results
 7. Discussion
 8. Conclusion
 9. Bibliography
- Appendix 1
Figures
Plates
-

December 2006

©Archaeological Investigations Ltd

St. Mary Magdalene Church
EARDISLEY
(NGR SO 3103 4901)

Archaeological Watching Brief

1. Summary

The project was undertaken during the excavation of footings and a service trench for a lean-to extension to the north of the church.

The main aim was to monitor all excavation to ensure that any archaeology present on the site was recorded to a satisfactory standard.

No archaeology was present, apart from human remains which were recorded and remained on site for reburial.

2. Introduction

Archaeological Investigations Ltd. was commissioned to undertake a watching brief during the excavation of footings and a service trench for a lean-to extension to the north of the north aisle of St. Mary Magdalene Church, Eardisley (Fig. 1). The extension covers an area of approximately 9.5m by 5m. The service trench runs from the west side of the extension along the front of the west tower before turning approximately 80 degrees and heading in a NNW direction across the churchyard to join up with the main sewer under the church's access road (Fig. 2).

Planning permission and a faculty were granted to the project on the condition that no ground works take place without the provision of an agreed programme of Archaeological works.

The fieldwork took place in two stages. The excavation of footings was monitored between the 3rd and 6th of October 2006 and the excavation of the service trench was monitored on the 12th and 13th of December 2006.

3. Archaeological and historical background (after Oakey 2006)

No previous archaeological work has been undertaken on the site itself.

The church of St. Mary Magdalene is built of sandstone rubble and is located within a churchyard 50m to the west of a motte and bailey castle. Formerly on the land of the Baskervilles, Eardisley church was one of several churches and chapels granted to the abbey of Llanthony Secunda near Gloucester in 1142. The church's most famous feature, the remarkable carved Romanesque font, probably pre-dates the grant to the abbey (Thurlby 1999, 123-7).

A north aisle was added to the existing nave and south aisle in the early 13th century. It was widened a little after 1300, when it was also extended to the east. The west tower, which the extension will abut, was probably built in 1708 to replace a predecessor which had burnt down. It has a battered plinth. The church was restored in 1862-3 (RCHME 1934, 50-52).

No extant headstones or other grave markers were present within the footprint of the proposed extension on a visit on 24th August 2006, nor were any signs apparent of a north porch.

4. Aims and objectives

The main aim of the project was to enable archaeological features to be adequately recorded in the areas affected by the proposal.

The main objectives of the work were to:

- a. Identify the date and nature of features being investigated.

- b. Assess survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures within the study area.
- c. Produce a record of the features.

5. Method

An archaeologist was present for phases one and two of the intrusive ground works connected with the extension. Due to an alteration to the footprint of the building, an area of approximately 3.5m² to the west of the phase one groundworks was excavated without an archaeologist being present (Fig. 2).

All human remains were cleaned, photographed using 35mm colour film and digital format, recorded, then removed and stored on site for reburial at a later time. A context record was produced and registers maintained for photographs, drawings and context records.

All trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50 and their location tied into the O/S grid using existing structures as reference points. Selected sections were drawn to record stratigraphy.

6. Results (Figure 2)

6.1 Structural remains

No significant archaeology was revealed during excavation. The foundation plinth for the existing northern aisle was encountered during excavation and shown to extend at least 1.40m below the current ground level (Plate 1).

A linear arrangement of large cobbled stones (108) was found in the north of the service trench contained within and above the natural soil horizon (Plate 2). Although there is a possibility that these formed the base of a very crude wall it is more likely that these were naturally occurring erratics within the natural. No evidence for bonding material was found.

6.2 Human remains

All human remains encountered were buried in the Christian tradition on an east-west alignment with the head to the west.

During phase one a total of eight burials were uncovered. None of these burials were found within 2.6m of the northern aisle of the church. Disturbance caused by service trenches including cut [102] appears to have removed all evidence for human burial in this area. Two burials were fully revealed. SK 106 was buried within a wooden coffin with iron handles (Plate 3). Badly preserved human remains measuring approximately 1.55m in length were

recovered from the coffin. Preservation of strands of fabric associated with the remains suggest interment within the twentieth century. SK 107 was of smaller stature than SK 106 and seems likely to be the remains of a child. Within the cranial cavity a machine made marble was found. The first machine made marbles were made in Germany and the USA in 1890 (www.wikipedia.org) and did not enter mass production until the early twentieth century. This would appear to fit with the dates that appear on surrounding headstones, suggesting burial in this area between 1890 and 1920.

The remaining six burials revealed during phase one were only partially revealed by the excavation and were in a poor state of preservation.

Excavation of the east-west service trench revealed that service trenches [102] had disturbed any human remains that may have been buried in this area. As the trench turned in a NNW direction across the churchyard however, human remains were encountered (Plate 4). The most significant burial in this trench was SK 105 (Plate 5). The 0.65m wide trench revealed a pair of lower leg bones (Tibia and Fibula) that appeared to belong to the same skeleton. In very close proximity were further sets of lower leg bones representing three legs in total. The close proximity of these bones (representing at least three individuals) would suggest either a multiple grave, or graves being dug extremely close together. It seems likely that further burials were concentrated in this area however a later grave cut (106) had removed the evidence for this. This concentration of remains shared similarities with a further two burials encountered in this trench. SK 103 and SK 104 (Plate 6) were found on a similar NEE-SWW alignment and were buried in relatively shallow graves (between 0.35m and 0.74m). The poor preservation of the bone in these burials would suggest that they are earlier than the remains discovered in phase one, although a lack of dating evidence recovered from the graves makes any attempt at dating the burials pure speculation.

7. Discussion

The disturbance caused to the subsoil by successive and repeated grave cuts, made the interpretation and phasing of the human remains extremely difficult. Grave cuts were only evident when they had penetrated the natural red clay at a depth of approximately 1.20m below ground level. Above this the subsoil appears as a homogenous layer interspersed with human remains (Plate 7), The quality of preservation is the strongest indication of age of burial, and even this is only relative. Based on this, the assumption is that the deeper graves (SK 106, SK 107 and cut 106) are more recent than the shallow graves uncovered in the northwest of the churchyard (SK 103, SK 104 and SK 105 group).

8. Conclusion

Nothing of archaeological significance was found during the excavation of the foundation and service trenches within the churchyard. The footings of the new building have disturbed a burial ground dating from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. The service trench has disturbed remains that are earlier in date.

9. Bibliography

Oakey, N., 2006 *St Mary Magdalene Church, Eardisley, Herefordshire. Archaeological Proposal*. Archaeological Investigations Ltd. Hereford.

RCHME (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England), 1934 *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Herefordshire. Volume III – North-west*.

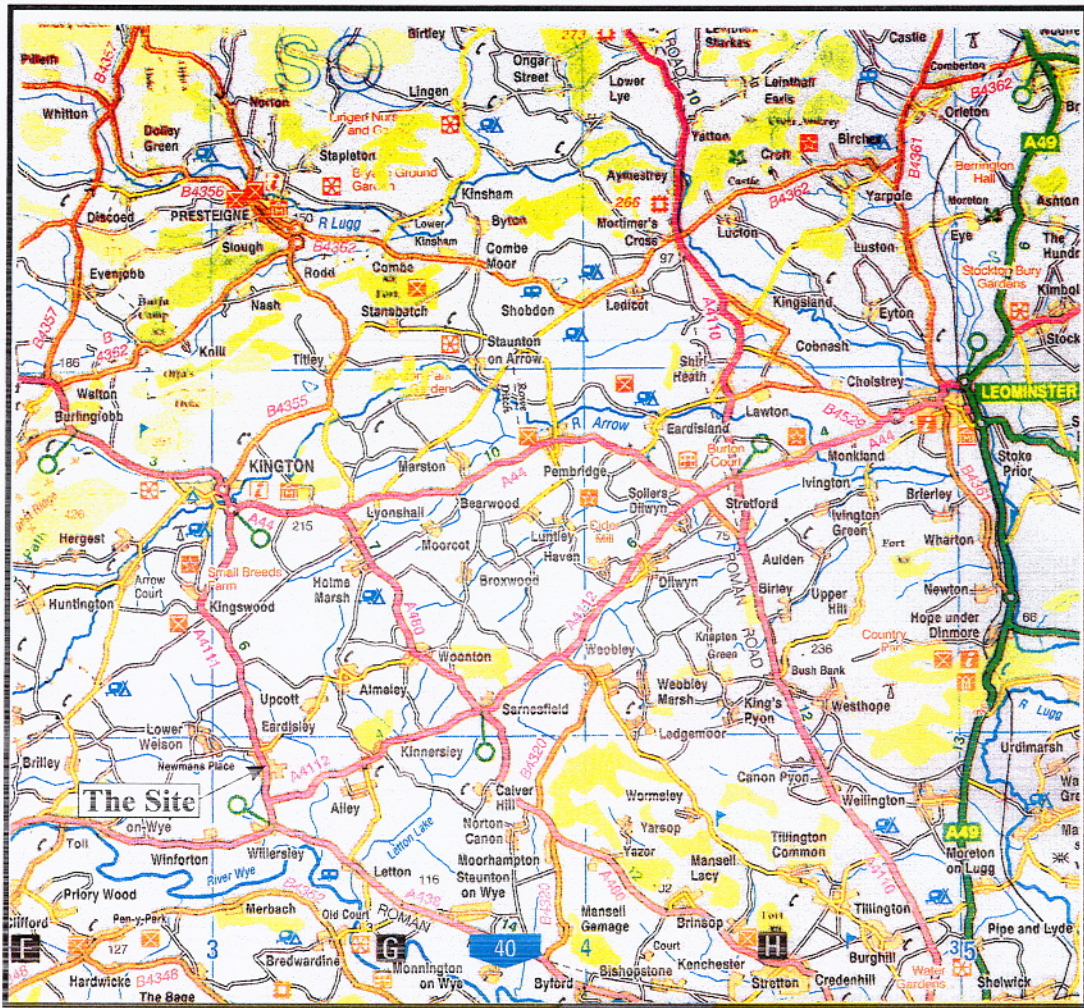
Thurlby, M., 1999 *The Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture*. Logaston Press.

www.wikipedia.org <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marbles>

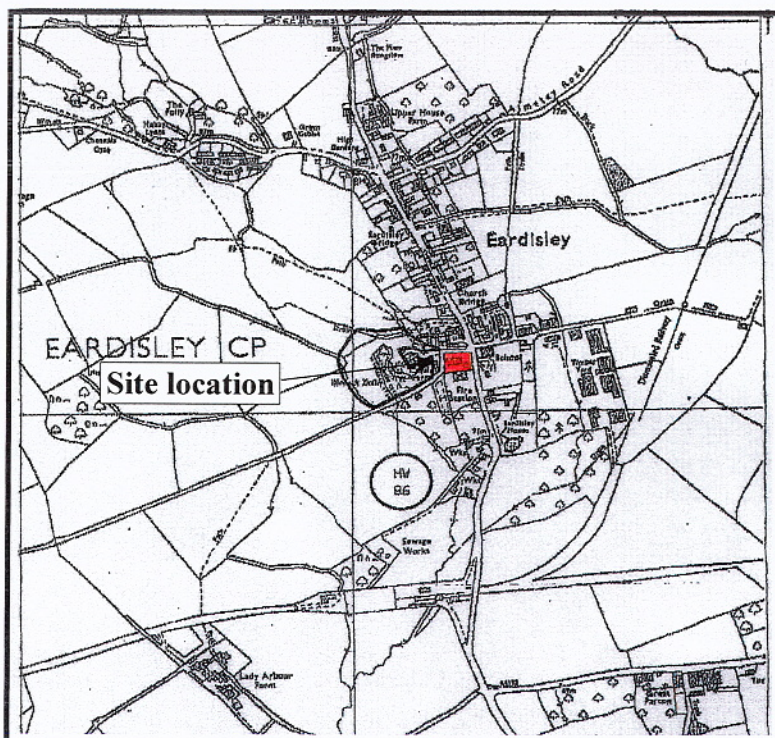
Appendix 1 – Site Archive

- 1x This report
- 2x Colour film photographs and negatives
- 1x Sheet of site drawings
- 1x Copy of EDM survey plan of phase one
- 1x Copy of fieldwork notes from phase one
- 1x Context register
- 1x Drawing register
- 10x Context sheets

St. Mary Magdalene Church



Grid Ref:
SO 3100



Reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping, by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright Archaeological Investigations Ltd. Unit 1, Premier Business Park, Westfields Trading Estate, Faraday Rd., Hereford. HR4 9NZ. License No. AL100015388

Grid Ref:
SO 4900

N
↑

Figure 1

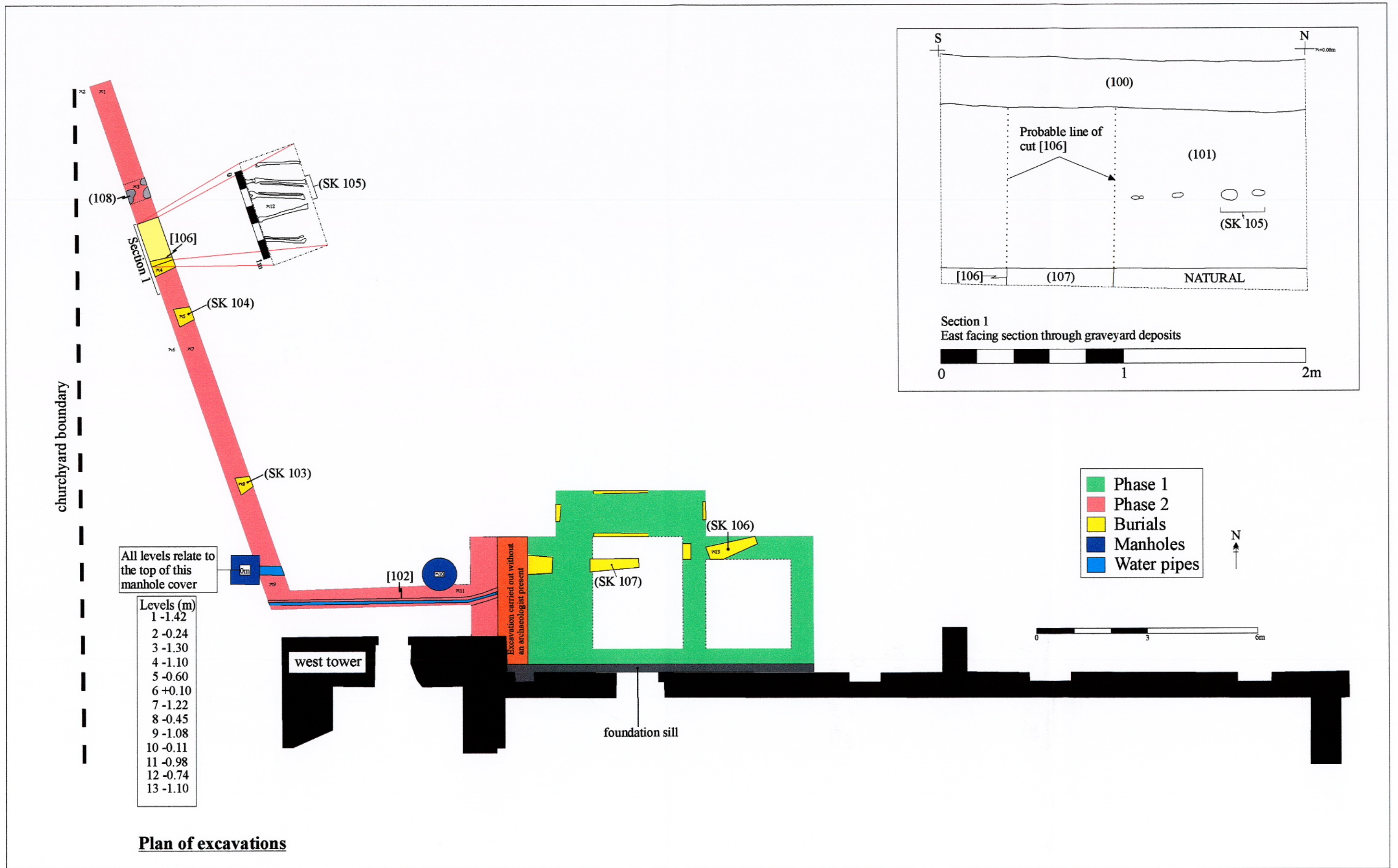


Figure 2



Plate 1 - Foundation levels of north aisle. Camera direction south.



Plate 2 - Possible wall feature (108). Camera direction north.

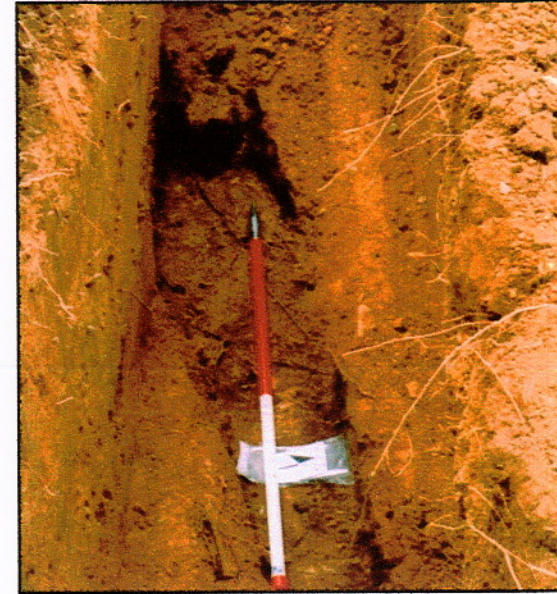


Plate 3 - Grave cut for (SK 106). Camera direction west.



Plate 4 - General shot of service trench. Camera direction NNW.



Plate 5 - Skeleton (SK 105) and associated lower leg bones. Camera direction north.



Plate 6 - Skeleton (SK 104). Camera direction north.



Plate 7 - Service trench section. Camera direction NW.