

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
St. John the Baptist Church,
Southover, Lewes, East Sussex**

NGR 541258 109635

**Project No. 3358
Site Code SJB 08**

**ASE Report No. 2008072
OASIS ID: archaeol6-42888**

Simon Stevens BA MIFA

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Abstract.

The manual excavation of four 1m² x 1m deep test-pits was archaeologically monitored, and the logs and samples from two bore-holes were also examined. No in situ articulated human remains were encountered during the monitoring, although a 'background scatter' of disarticulated human bone and coffin fittings was recorded.

Two of the test-pits allowed limited recording of the church fabric located below ground, and another provided evidence of buried masonry in the churchyard.

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Archaeological Background**
- 3.0 Archaeological Methodology**
- 4.0 Results**
- 5.0 Discussion**
- 6.0 Acknowledgements**

Bibliography
Acknowledgements

SMR Summary Sheet
OASIS Form

- Figure 1 Site Location Plan**
- Figure 2 Test Pit Location Plan**
- Figure 3 Test Pit No. 4: Plan and Sections**
- Figure 4 Test Pit No. 5: Plan and Sections**
- Figure 5 Test-Pit No. 6: Plan and Section**
- Figure 6 Test-Pit No. 7: Plan and Section**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Archaeology South-East (ASE) a division of University College London Centre for Applied Archaeology (UCLCAA) was commissioned by Mackeller Schwerdt Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of four test-pits, and two bore-holes within the churchyard of St. John the Baptist Church, Southover, Lewes (NGR 541258 109635) (Fig. 1).
- 1.2** The church lies on the south side of Southover High Street, with a small churchyard mostly surrounded by residential development, but with the above-ground remains of the Cluniac Priory of St. Pancras c.60m to the south. According to the British Geological Survey 1: 50 000 map of the area (Sheet 319, *Lewes*), the underlying geological deposit at the site is Middle/Upper Chalk, with Alluvium to the north and Head Deposits to the east.
- 1.3** It is understood that a planning application will soon be submitted to Lewes District Council for the erection of a new Chapter House at the site. In view of the high archaeological potential of the site, Vivienne Coad of English Heritage, in her capacity as acting Diocesan Archaeological Adviser recommended that four test pits be excavated within the footprint of the proposed extension prior to submission of the planning application in order to gain information on the depths of existing foundations and on the archaeological implications of the scheme. The current project is aimed at supplementing information gained from a previous archaeological evaluation at the site (ASE 2006a, see below).
- 1.4** A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by Dan Swift of Archaeology South-East in March 2008 describing the appropriate methodology for an archaeological monitoring of the excavation of the test-pits at the site. This document outlined the potential need for further archaeological work at the site, based on the results of the watching brief. The WSI was approved by Vivienne Coad prior to the commencement of work at the site.
- 1.5** The on-site monitoring was undertaken during late March and early April 2008 by Simon Stevens (Senior Archaeologist). The bore-hole logs were examined by Lucy Sibun (Senior Archaeologist). The project was managed by Neil Griffin (fieldwork) and Louise Rayner (post-excavation).

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The site lies in an area of Lewes rich in historic standing buildings and known below-ground archaeological remains. The church probably originated as a 'hospitium' or guesthouse of the nearby Priory of St. Pancras, founded by William de Warenne in 1077 (Houghton 1983). The current fabric incorporates 12th century features, and a mostly 14th century nave, an unusual 18th century tower, and a chapel built in 1847 to house the remains of William de Warenne and his first wife Gundrada, disturbed during the building of the Brighton to Lewes railway through the Priory in 1845 (*ibid.*) The chapel also houses Gundrada's Tournai marble grave slab, which has a fascinating history of its own (Anderson 1992)
- 2.2** The churchyard of St. John the Baptist was the subject of a thorough graveyard survey, and subsequent analysis carried out under the auspices of the East Sussex Archaeology and Museums Project (Bareham 2003)
- 2.3** Recent archaeological work in the vicinity of the site has highlighted the archaeological potential of Southover. A watching brief during redevelopment on a site located at the corner of Garden Street and Priory Street resulted in the discovery of a number of medieval pits and other features of a later date (ASE 2006b).
- 2.4** In addition, a recent archaeological evaluation undertaken at the site uncovered a moderate quantity of disarticulated human bone and associated iron coffin fittings, as well as evidence of substantial reconstruction work on the church. The evaluation also resulted in the discovery of an in situ early 20th century burial at a depth of only 820mm below the current ground surface. The trenches located at least one, although probably two, substantial vaulted tombs, and/or a buried wall foundation with no surviving surface elements (ASE 2006a).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** Four test-pits were located within the footprint of the proposed Chapter House, positioned in areas free from gravestones and tombs. The test-pits were excavated manually under archaeological supervision. The bore-holes were excavated at a later date within two of the test-pits, and the logs and recovered samples were made available to Archaeology South-East.
- 3.2** All encountered archaeological deposits, features and finds were recorded according to accepted professional standards, using standard Archaeology South-East context record sheets. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart. As stipulated in the WSI, all encountered disarticulated human bone, and associated artefacts (e.g. coffin fittings) were bagged and reburied in plastic bags within the test-pits.
- 3.4** The test-pits were levelled to the Ordnance Datum from values on a plan supplied by the client.

3.5 A full photographic record of the work was kept and will form part of the site archive. The archive is presently held at the Archaeology South-East office in Chapel Place, Portslade and will be offered to Barbican House, Lewes in due course.

3.6 The site archive will consist of the following elements:

Number of Contexts	20
Number of files/paper records	1 file
Plans and Section Sheets	2
Photographs	digital
Finds /Bulk Samples	none retained

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Test-Pit No. 4 (Fig. 3)

4.1.1 Test-Pit No. 4 (given this number to provide clear differentiation from the three test-pits dug during previous archaeological work at the site, ASE 2006a, and Fig. 2) was excavated against the buttress located on the south-western angle of the church tower (Fig. 2). This resulted in triangular shape, which measured c.1m by c.1m by c.1.2m. It allowed examination and recording of the buried masonry foundation of the buttress and of part of the tower foundation.

4.1.2 The Test-Pit was excavated to a depth of 1.0m (10.68mAOD). The uppermost deposit was context [4/001], a c.660mm thick deposit of mid-brown loamy topsoil. This overlay context [4/002], a deposit of mixed chalk rubble and topsoil, which extended to the base of the test-pit (Fig 3, S1). It contained a block of grey sandstone (given the context [4/008]) measuring 660mm in width and 210mm in height in the eastern section of the test-pit (Fig. 3, S2). It extended beyond the southern baulk of the test-pit and may be part of a structure, or could sit in isolation. A small assemblage of human bone and a limited number of coffin fittings were recovered from contexts [4/001] and [4/002].

4.1.3 The recorded elevation of the masonry of the buttress (Fig. 3, S3) consisted of a 200mm deep green sandstone plinth (context [4/003]), which had been partially above-ground, and continued eastwards to form part of the tower (see below). The excavation of the test-pit revealed a short portion of the foundation of the buttress, which consisted of neatly cut blocks of greenish sandstone, set in a yellowish grey sandy mortar, which included small pieces of flint (context [4/004]). The masonry was mostly regularly coursed with some irregular-sized blocks. This masonry extended 800mm below the ground surface. It overlay a similarly partially irregular stretch of masonry consisting of chalk blocks set in a similar mortar, (context [4/005]), which continued to the base of the test-pit. The limited area available for study did not allow a fuller appreciation of the method of construction of the plinth, or of the other stonework.

4.1.4 A small width (c.200mm) of the foundation of the tower was also uncovered (Fig 3, S4). The masonry was of a similar build, with the continuing green

sandstone plinth (context [4/003]) built onto green sandstone blocks (context [4/007]), which in turn overlay chalk blocks, (context [4/006]), which extended to the base of the test-pit. Both types of masonry were laid in a sandy mortar similar to that recorded below the buttress. However, the green sandstone element was notably thinner (c.400mm in thickness). Again the restricted exposure allowed only a limited appreciation of the method of construction, and the depth of the foundation below both the buttress and the masonry of the tower itself was not ascertained.

4.2 Test-Pit No. 5 (Fig. 4)

4.2.1 Test-Pit No. 5 was excavated against the west wall of the south aisle of the church, to the north of the doorway (Fig. 2). It measured 1m by 1m, and was 1m deep (10.41mAOD) (Fig. 4, S1). The area had been heavily disturbed by the laying of service trenches. The southern section of the test-pit showed the sandstone threshold of the church door (context [5/001]) was 160mm in thickness. It overlay a c.350mm thick, dark blackish brown deposit of silty clay containing a high concentration of tile, bricks, chalk fragments and pieces of broken ceramic drain (context [5/002]).

4.2.2 This in turn overlay context [5/003], a layer of chalk rubble and topsoil, similar to context [4/002] encountered in Test Pit No. 4. This extended to the base of the trench, and partly overlay context [5/005], part of the masonry foundation of the south-aisle (see below), which protruded 170mm into the test pit (Fig. 4).

4.2.3 The uppermost part of the revealed masonry foundation of the south aisle consisted of green sandstone and yellow sandstone blocks laid in regular courses (context [5/004], bonded with a greyish yellow sandy mortar similar in texture to that encountered below the buttress. This extended 800mm below the ground surface. It overlay chalk masonry (Context [5/005]) which was difficult to clean and record in the narrow confines of the test-pit. It appeared to extend to the base of the test-pit (Fig. 4, S2).

4.2.4 No human bones or significant archaeological artefacts were recovered from the test-pit.

4.3 Test-Pit No. 6 (Fig. 5)

4.3.1 Test-Pit No. 6 was excavated in the south-east corner of the proposed footprint of the new Chapter House (Fig. 2). It measured 1m by 1m, and was 1m deep (10.11mAOD) and was also the site of a borehole. The uppermost deposit was context [6/001], a c.230mm thick deposit of mid-brown loamy topsoil, similar in character to context [4/001], encountered in Test-Pit No. 4. It overlay context [6/002], a deposit of chalk rubble mixed with topsoil, similar to context [4/002], in Test-Pit No. 4 (Fig 4, S1). It extended to the base of the trench, and evidence from the borehole logs suggest that it extended to a depth of 1.6m below the surface (9.53mAOD).

4.3.2 A substantial quantity of disarticulated human bone and a limited number of coffin fittings were recovered from contexts [4/001] and [4/002]. Human bone was recovered from bore-hole samples from a depth of 1.5m below the

ground surface (9.63mAOD), illustrating a deep build-up of deposits at the site, or possibly the location of a grave.

4.4 Test-Pit No. 7 (Fig. 6)

4.4.1 Test Pit No. 7 was located to the south of the tower buttress, and was also the site of a bore-hole. It measured 1m by 1m and was 1m deep (10.52mAOD) (Fig 6, S1). The uppermost deposit encountered in the test-pit was context [7/001], a c.210mm thick deposit of mid-brown loamy topsoil, similar to other surface deposits encountered at the site. It overlay context [7/002], a c.520mm thick deposit of mixed chalk rubble and topsoil also similar to other deposits at the site. This in turn overlay chalk masonry of unknown extent (context [7/003]). Much of the surface of the masonry was covered with a yellowish grey sandy mortar, which made detailed recording impossible. The surface of the masonry was encountered a depth of 700mm (10.82mAOD).

4.4.2 The masonry, and context [7/002] had been truncated by a ?grave cut, [7/004] which was more than 600mm wide (east to west), and more than 700mm long (north to south), and occupied almost half of the test-pit. It had been backfilled with a deposit which was similar in texture to context [7/002], but slightly browner in colour, [7/005]. The bore-hole log suggested that this deposit extended to a depth of 2m below the ground surface (9.52mAOD). Human bone was recovered from bore-hole samples taken between 1.7m and 2m below the ground surface, again suggesting a great depth of deposit, or a deeply dug grave. Disarticulated human bone and coffin fittings were also recovered from context [7/002].

5.0 DISCUSSION

- 5.1** Much of the material encountered during the watching brief was typical of a repeatedly used burial ground, with the digging of graves over a lengthy period resulting in the disarticulation of human bone and the scattering of coffin fittings within the graveyard soil, similar to the results of previous archaeological work at the site (ASE 2006a). The bore-hole logs suggest that this activity has left up to c.2m of overburden overlying the 'natural' chalk.
- 5.2** No *in situ* human remains were encountered during the on-site monitoring, although it is possible that the human bone recorded in the bore-hole samples was from undisturbed burials, previously protected by their depth (1.5m to 2.0m below the current ground surface).
- 5.3** The exposure of short stretches of the foundations of the tower, the associated south-western buttress and part of the south aisle, allowed a record to be made of the masonry, but no clear conclusions can be drawn from such limited work.
- 5.4** Arguably the most interesting element of the monitoring was the presence of buried chalk masonry in test-pit No. 7. The masonry was on a clear alignment with the south wall of the south aisle, and with similar masonry encountered during the previous archaeological work at the site, found at much the same depth (in Trench 3: ASE 2006a). Unfortunately, the stonework found in 2006 could not be investigated owing to the presence of an *in situ* burial above it (*ibid*), and that found during the current project had been partially removed by a grave cut.
- 5.5** The ground plan of the church reproduced in Brent's book on Lewes is of unknown origin, but hints that the south aisle may have been larger at some point (2004, fig 4.3). The evidence from both phases of archaeological work suggests that there may be some substance to this, but clearly the nature of the investigation carried out so far does not allow a firm conclusion.
- 5.6** The second phase of archaeological work at the site has clearly added to the dataset from the first ASE investigation in 2006. It appears, based on currently available evidence, that there are no shallow burials in the area of the proposed Chapter House, but that there is the potential for the survival of buried stonework, both from tombs and from foundations of walls within the footprint of the proposed new building.

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Acknowledgements

Archaeology South-East would like to acknowledge the help offered by all those involved in the field, and to those who allowed the examination of the bore-hole logs. The input of Mr. Andrew Goodwin of Mackellar Schwerdt Architects is also gratefully acknowledged.

SMR Summary Sheet

Site Code	SJB 06					
Identification Name and Address	Churchyard of St. John the Baptist Church, Southover					
County, District &/or Borough	Lewes District, East Sussex					
Full 12 Fig. OS Grid Refs.	541258 109635					
Archaeology South-East Proj. No.	3358					
Type of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	Watching Brief ✓	Standing Structure	Survey	Other
Type of Site	Green Field	Shallow Urban	Deep Urban	Other <i>Churchyard</i>		
Dates of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	WB. <i>March-April 2008</i>	Other		
Sponsor/Client	Mackeller Schwerdt Architects					
Project Manager	Neil Griffin/Louise Rayner					
Project Supervisor	Simon Stevens					
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	BA	IA	RB
	AS	MED ?✓	PM ✓	Other		
<p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p><i>The manual excavation of four 1m² and 1m deep test-pits was archaeologically monitored, and the logs and samples from two bore-holes were examined. No in situ articulated human remains were encountered during the monitoring, although a 'background scatter' of disarticulated human bone and coffin fittings was recorded.</i></p> <p><i>Two of the test-pits allowed limited recording of the church fabric located below ground, and another provided evidence of buried masonry in the churchyard.</i></p>						

OASIS ID: archaeol6-42888

? Project details

Project name	Watching Brief at St. John the Baptist, Southover, Lewes
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring undertaken during manual excavation of four test-pits. Two bore-hole logs and samples also examined.
Project dates	Start: 31-03-2008 End: 01-04-2008
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	SJB 08 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	3358 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status (other)	Churchyard
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	n/a None
Monument type	n/a None
Significant Finds	human bone Medieval
Significant Finds	human bone Post Medieval
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt (other)	Pre-Planning request from Diocesan Archaeologist

Status Complete

? Project location

Site location	EAST SUSSEX LEWES LEWES St John the Baptist Church, Southover
Postcode	BN7
Study area	4 Square metres
Site coordinates	NGR - TQ 41258 09635 LL - 50.868361187 0.00769621841114 (decimal) LL - 50 52 06 N 000 00 27 E (degrees) Point
Height OD	Min: 9.52m Max: 9.63m

Status Complete

? Project creators

Name of Organisation	Archaeology South-East
Project brief originator	Archaeology South East
Project design originator	Archaeology South-East
Project director/manager	Neil Griffin
Project supervisor	Simon Stevens
Type of sponsor/funding body	Client
Name of sponsor/funding body	Mackeller Schwerdt Architects


Status Complete

? Project archives

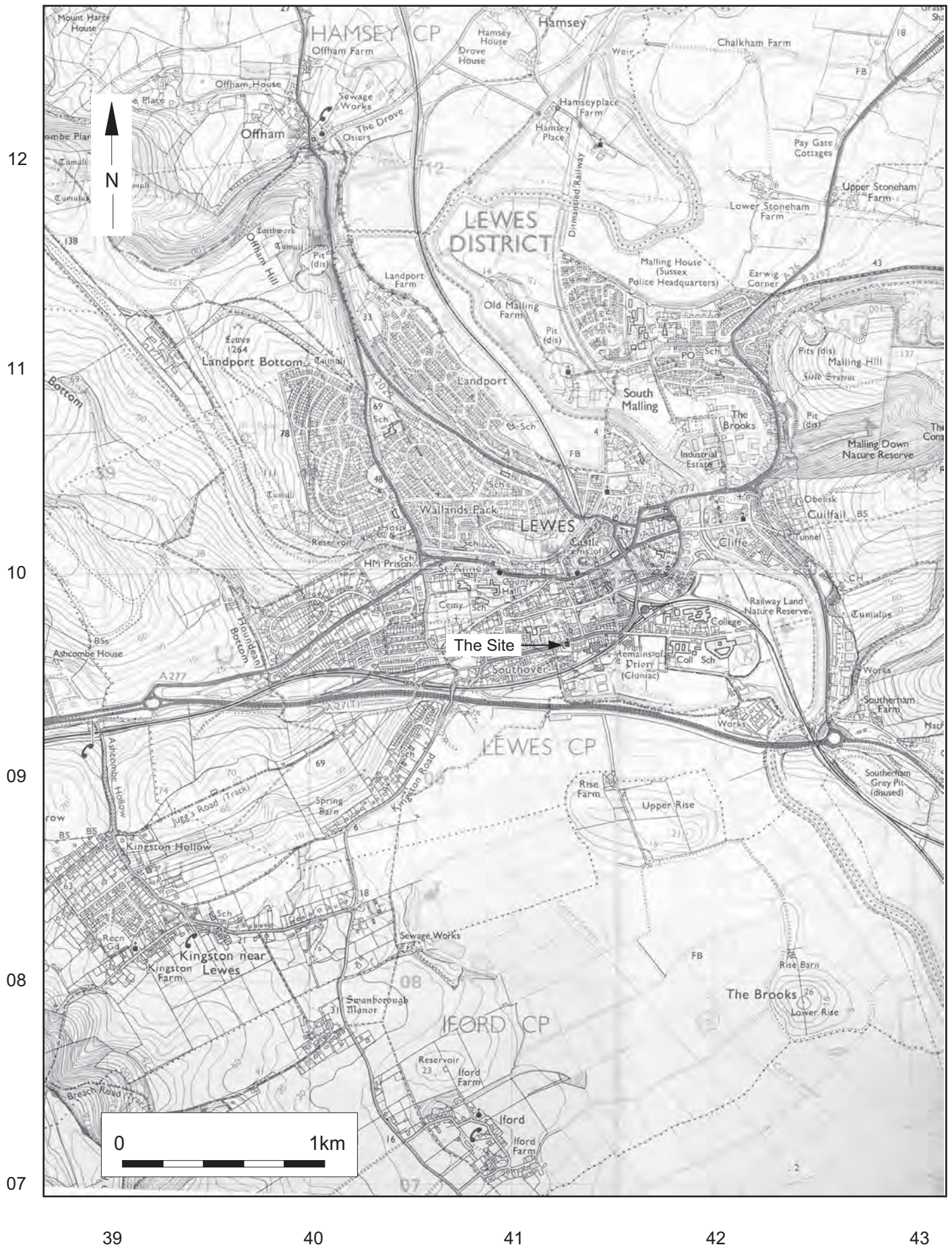
Physical Archive Exists?	'No physical archive'
Digital Archive Exists?	'No digital archive'
Paper Archive recipient	Lewes Museum
Paper Contents	'other'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet', 'Correspondence', 'Drawing', 'Map', 'Photograph', 'Plan', 'Report', 'Section'

Status Complete

? Project bibliography 1

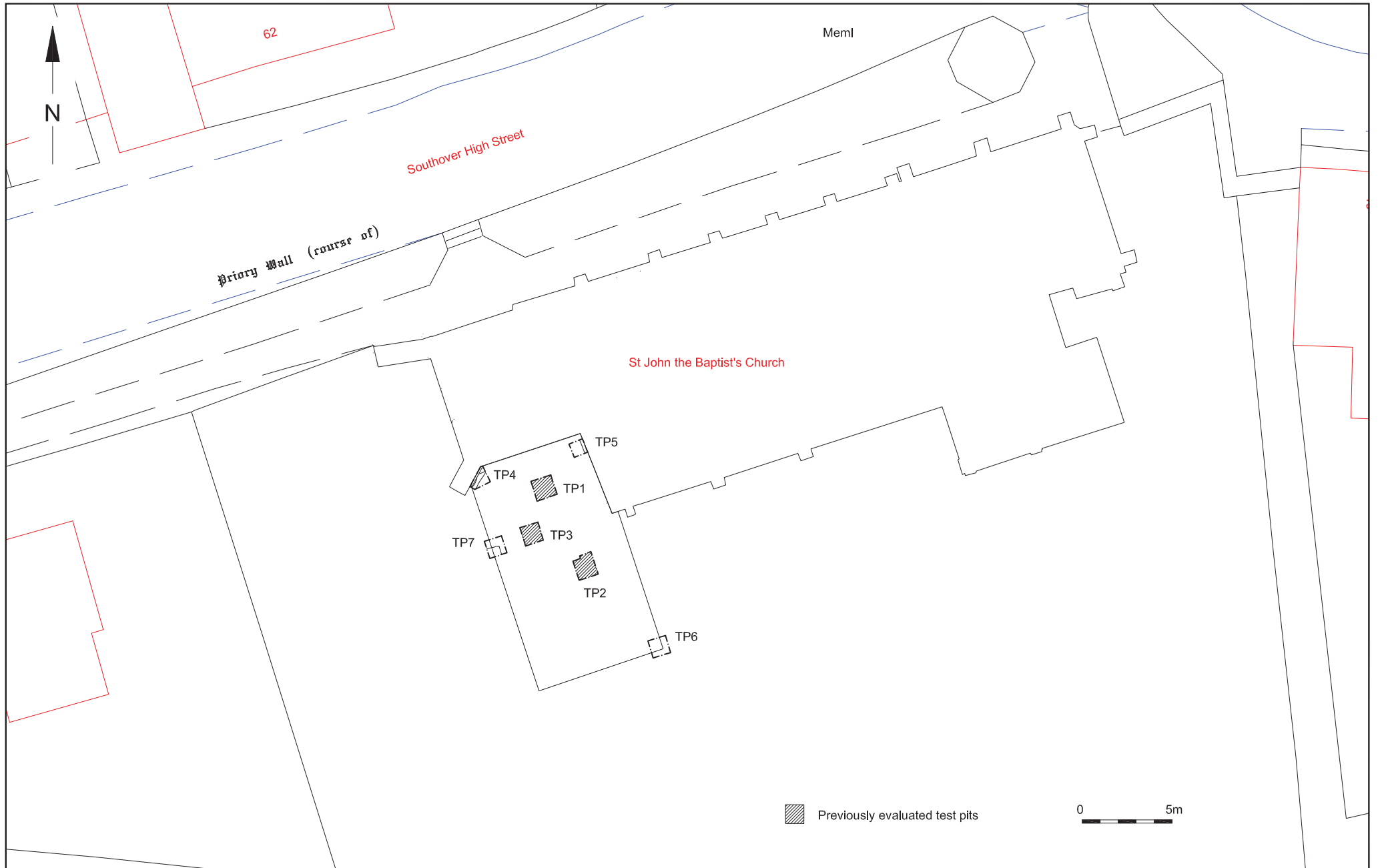
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)_1	
Title	An Archaeological Watching Brief at St. John the Baptist Church, Southover, Lewes, East Sussex	
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Stevens, S	

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Date	2008
Issuer or publisher	Archaeology South-East
Place of issue or publication	Portslade, East Sussex
Description	Standard ASE format client report : A4-sized with logos.
Status	Complete



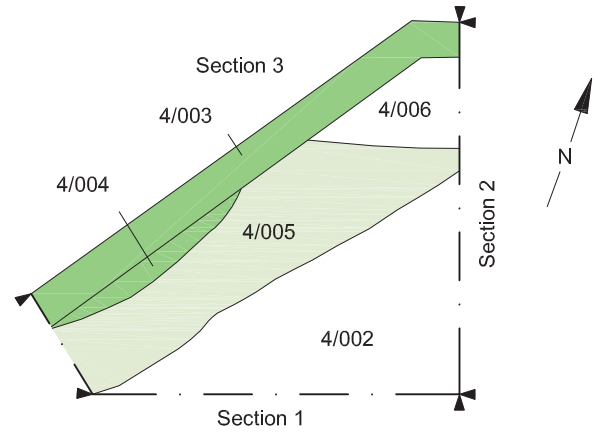
© Archaeology South-East		St. John the Baptist, Southover	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 3358	May 2008	Site Location Plan	
Report Ref: 2008072	Drawn by: JLR		

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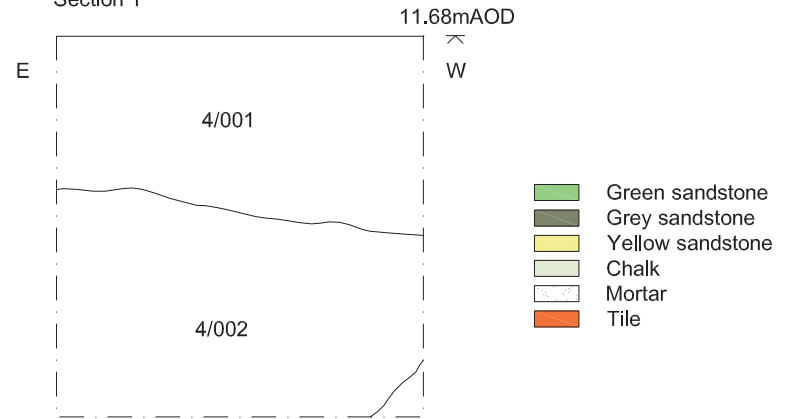


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Report Ref: 2008072	Drawn by: SM/JR		

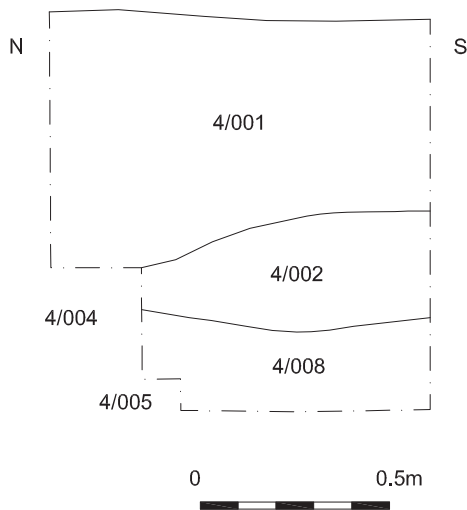
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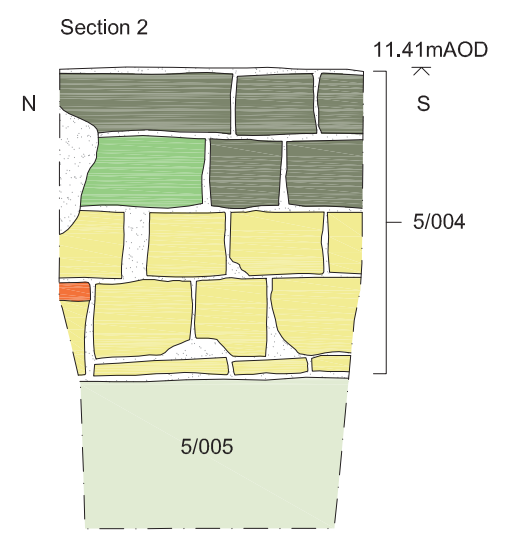
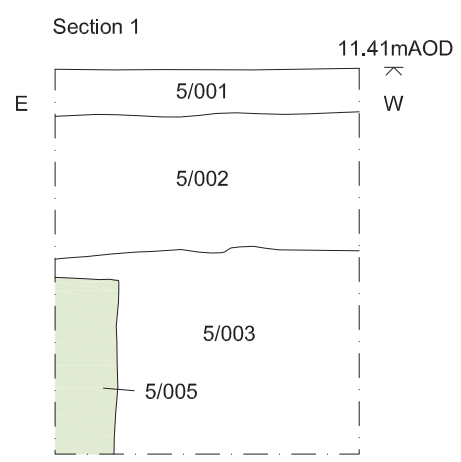
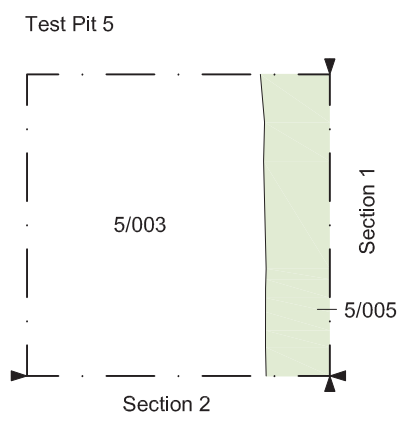


Section 2



Section 3

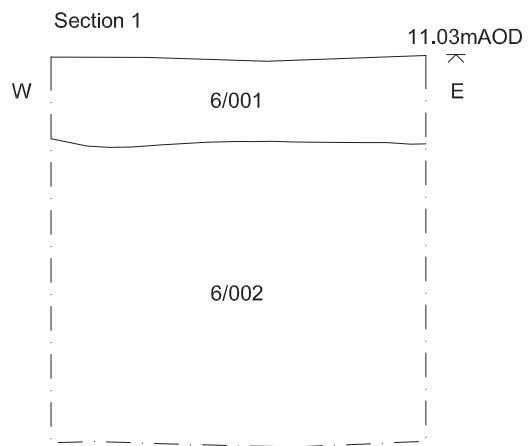
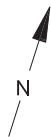
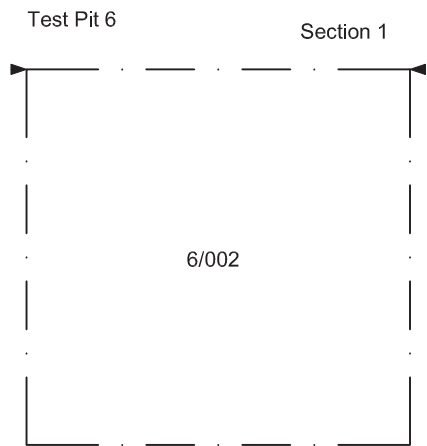




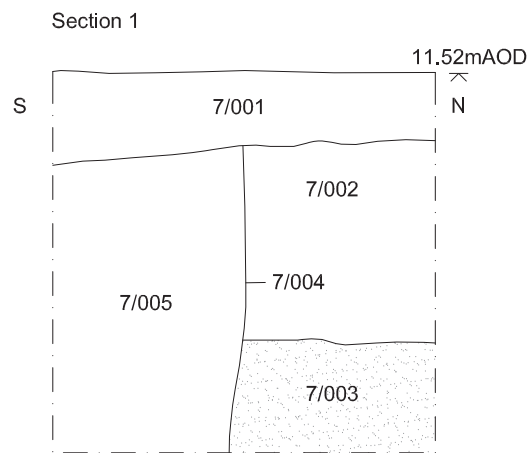
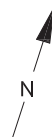
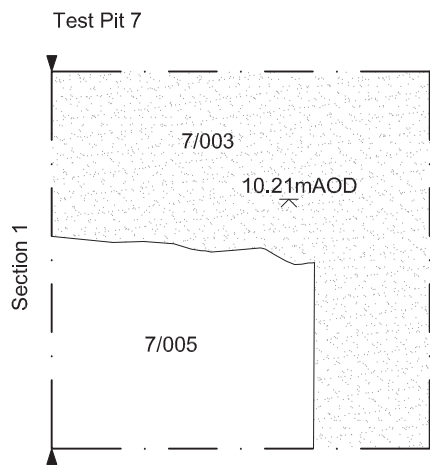
- Green sandstone
- Grey sandstone
- Yellow sandstone
- Chalk
- Mortar
- Tile



© Archaeology South-East		St. John the Baptist Church, Southover	Fig. 4
Project Ref: 3358	May 2008	Test Pit 5: Plan and sections	
Report Ref: 2008072	Drawn by: JLR		



© Archaeology South-East		St. John the Baptist Church, Southover	Fig. 5
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