

Coombes Church, Nr. Lancing, West Sussex.

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



NGR 519062 108153

ASE Project no. 2394

Report Number 2007155

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Summary

Archaeology South East were commissioned by John D Clarke and Partners to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Coombes Church, Lancing, West Sussex, (centred NGR 519062 108153). Hand excavation of three pits measuring 1.0m² and up to 1.0m deep for installation of a lighting conductor earthing system were monitored. The remains of probably structural mortared flint, two skulls and part of an articulated burial were recovered from the north side of the church in Pit 1, whilst two articulated burials were recorded in Pit 3 and additional, fragmentary remains were recovered from Pits 2 and 3. The earliest artefact was a residual C13th – 14th pottery fragment. A linear feature of unknown purpose was recorded running east to west on the south side of the church in Pit 3.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Archaeology South-East (ASE), the contracting division of the UCL Institute of Archaeology Centre for Applied Archaeology, were commissioned by John D Clarke and Partners to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Coombes Church, Lancing, West Sussex, (centred NGR 519062 108153), (Figures 1 and 2)
- 1.2 Church Faculty was granted for the restoration of the bell turret of the church, as well as other associated works, including the installation of a lightning conductor and drainage improvement works. Due to the archaeological potential of the church (as a Grade 1 Listed Building), English Heritage requested that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during all intrusive groundworks undertaken at the church.
- 1.3 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared for approval by English Heritage (Hart 2007). All work was carried out in accordance with this document and the relevant *Standards and Guidance* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), as well as with reference to West Sussex Country Council's, *Recommended Standard Archaeological Conditions*, henceforth referred to as The Standard Conditions.
- 1.4 The British and Geological Survey Sheet 318/333 shows the site lies on Upper and Middle Chalk.
- 1.5 The on-site work was undertaken by Deon Whittaker between the 25th and 27th September 2007. The project was managed by Neil Griffin (Project Manager) and Louise Rayner (Post - Ex Manager)

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The following information has been taken from the Guide to the Church of Coombes, (Steer, 1966). The surviving nave and chapel demonstrate that Coombes Church was originally built in the 11th-12th century. There is evidence of alterations during the 13th-14th centuries, when the nave was widened, and 16th-18th century windows and the porch attest to continued alterations during these periods. Generally however, the church remains a largely unspoilt building and is most notable for the fine series of 12th century wall paintings that adorn the interior.
- 2.2 A watching brief was carried out by Archaeology South-East in March 2006 during the excavation of three small investigative trial pits adjacent to the north wall of the church (ASE 2006). Undifferentiated topsoil was recorded in all three pits, as were the upper courses of the foundations of the north wall of the church. No other archaeological deposits or structures were observed.

3.0 AIMS

- 3.1 The general objective of the archaeological work was to monitor the groundworks in order to ensure that any features, artefacts or ecofacts of archaeological interest exposed and affected by the excavations were recorded and interpreted to appropriate standards.
- 3.2 Groundworks associated with the development were monitored by an archaeologist until the limit of excavation was reached. These comprised
 - Hand excavation of three pits measuring 1.0m² and up to 1.0m deep for installation of a lighting conductor earthing system (Fig. 2).

4.0 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 All excavations were undertaken by hand. Excavation proceeded to the full depth of the test pit (c. 1.0m) or until archaeological deposits were encountered, whichever was uppermost.
- 4.2 In the event that archaeological remains were encountered, excavation ceased to allow the remains to be investigated further.
- 4.3 The archaeologist inspected the surfaces revealed. Any archaeological structures or features revealed were recorded in plan and section as appropriate. All excavated human remains were retained by the church for re-internment at a later date. The remains of each internment were bagged separately and clearly labeled. All non-articulated human bone was bagged collectively. Human remains that continued beyond the limitations of the main contractor's groundworks were left *in situ*. Each grave was scanned with a metal detector to facilitate the recovery of coffin fittings, shroud pins, etc.
- 4.4 The main contractor allowed the archaeological contractor reasonable time and resources to undertake any inspection or recording required.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Three pits were excavated (Figure 2). Each measured approximately 1.0m by 1.0m and up to 1.0m deep. Contexts are listed below from latest to earliest in stratigraphical order unless indicated otherwise and were recorded as follows:

5.2 **Pit 1** (Figure 3, Plan and Sections 1 & 2).

(Adjacent to the northeast corner of the church) 1.3m x 1m x 1m deep. At 17.2 metres AOD at ground level, Pit 1 contained the remains of a probable mortared flint structure, a feature containing two skulls and the head end of an articulated burial.

Context	Type	Description	Max Depth
02	Deposit	Topsoil	16.9m AOD
03	Deposit	Graveyard soil	16.5m AOD
01	Masonry	Mortared flint	16.5m AOD
12	Masonry	Flint and mortar	16.5m AOD
08	Fill	Fill of 04	16.2m AOD
04	Cut	Area of disturbance/?Pit	16.2m AOD
05	Deposit	Graveyard soil.	16.2m AOD

Context 02, dark brownish-grey topsoil containing ceramic building material (CBM), flint and chalk flecks and overlying a silty deposit **Context 03** and mortared flint **Contexts 01, 12**.

Context 03, a friable mid brown graveyard soil containing flint nodules and chalk flecks, 400mm thick in Pit 1. It is possible that **Context 3** butts up against **Context 12** but this was unclear. **Context 3** does however overlay **Contexts 08** and **05**.

Context 01, a length of apparently *in situ* mortared flint consisted of flint nodules bound by a sandy lime mortar, extending perpendicularly from the north wall of the church. A width of 300mm was visible within the trench. This section of the probable structure appeared to have a relatively flat upper surface. A less consolidated continuation of the flint and mortar structure (**Context 12**) was recorded in the south facing section of the pit, continuing for a length of 600mm (Fig. 3, plan and section1).

Context 04 represents a disturbed area or possible pit (approximately 600mm wide and at least 300mm deep) cut into **Context 5** beneath and was not fully excavated. The excavated portion exhibited convex sides with an overall slope of 45 degrees. This was filled by **Context 8**.

Context 08 consisted of loose silty material with occasional chalk rubble, flint fragments and chalk flecks. It contained three mature male skulls. Two of these skulls were fragmentary, one was complete and had associated neck vertebrae visible in the north east facing section.

Context 05 was a probable graveyard soil consisting of a firm to friable, mid brown silty deposit containing very common chalk fragments up to 20mm and occasional flint nodules.

5.3 Pit 2

(Adjacent to the northwest corner of the church) 1m x 1m x 1m deep. At 17.08m AOD at ground level, Pit 2 revealed no features and a residual C13th – 14th pot fragment.

Context	Type	Description	Max Depth
02	Deposit	Topsoil	16.8m AOD
03	Deposit	Graveyard soil	16.7m AOD
05	Deposit	Graveyard soil	16.2m AOD

Context 02, Dark brownish-grey topsoil containing CBM, flint and chalk flecks and overlying a silty deposit **Context 03**.

Context 03, a friable, medium brown, silty deposit containing flint nodules and chalk flecks, 200mm thick.

Context 05, a firm to friable, mid brown silty deposit containing very common chalk fragments up to 20mm and occasional flint nodules. Bone fragments were recovered from this deposit.

5.4 Pit 3 (Figure 3, Plan and Section 3)

(Adjacent to the southwest corner of the church) 1m x 1m x 1m deep. At 18.00 metres AOD at ground level, Pit 3 contained two cuts, one above the other. The upper cut's fill contained one fragment of shell, the lower cut contained two articulated burials and long bone fragments from at least one other individual.

Context	Type	Description	Max Depth
02	Deposit	Topsoil	17.80m AOD
09	Fill	Fill of 07	17.05m AOD
07	Cut	Cut of Probable ditch	17.05m AOD
03	Deposit	Graveyard soil	17.40m AOD

05	Deposit	Graveyard soil	17.30m AOD
10	Fill	Fill of 11	17m AOD
11	Cut	Grave	17m AOD
06	Layer	Natural Chalk	17m AOD

Context 02 Dark brownish-grey topsoil containing bone, pottery, CBM, flint and chalk flecks and overlies a silty deposit **Context 03** and the fill **Context 09** of cut **Context 07**.

Context 09 is a loose, dark brown grey, silty fill, containing occasional flint and chalk fragments. No human remains were present. This may be backfill for probable ditch **Context 07**.

Context 07 appears to be a step-sided ditch at least 800mm in width and 780mm in depth. The feature could be described as having an inverted 'bell shape' (See Figure 3, Section 3). This feature cuts:

Context 03, a friable, medium brown silty subsoil containing flint nodules and chalk flecks, 500mm thick. The same deposit is recorded in Pits 1 and 2.

Context 05, a firm to friable, light brown silty deposit containing very common chalk fragments up to 20mm and occasional flint nodules. The same deposit is recorded in Pits 1 and 2. **Context 05** was found to contain human bone fragments.

Context 10 is the backfill of grave cut **Context 11**, underlying **Context 05** and cut by **Context 07**. Consisting of a firm, light brown grey silt, this material had common inclusions of chalk rubble and flint nodules and contained at least two articulated burials and long bone fragments from at least one other individual. **Context 10** extended across the width of the trench.

5.5 The Finds by Luke Barber

The archaeological work recovered a small assemblage of finds. These are quantified in Table 1.

Cxt	Pottery	Wt (g)	CBM	Wt (g)	Shell	Wt (g)	Flint	Wt (g)	Stone	Wt (g)	Fe	Wt (g)	Mortar/cement	Wt (g)
1													2	216
2	1	14	2	174					5	462			1	32
3					2	20								
5	1	<2			3	102	1	180			1	4		
9					1	48								

Table 1: Quantification of Finds

- 5.5.1 A faced nodule of downland flint and some pieces of quite hard off-white/cream sandy lime mortar with sub-rounded flint grits to 7mm were the only finds from [1]. The mortar cannot be closely dated as it is a type that could easily have been in use between the later medieval period to as late as the 18th century.
- 5.5.2 The finds from [2] are very mixed. The earliest piece consists of a sherd from an oxidised 13th- to mid 14th- century bowl tempered with moderate medium/coarse sand. This deposit also produced a number of fragments of Horsham stone roofing slate with adhering off-white sandy lime mortar. This roofing material becomes common in the 15th and 16th centuries but is also common on later buildings. The ceramic tile from [2] consists of well made and fired peg tile fragments tempered with sparse fine sand with rare inclusions of larger quartz and iron oxides to 3mm. An 18th- to 19th- century date is likely. The only other find from [2] consists of a piece of grey cement render of 19th- to 20th- century date.
- 5.5.3 Context [5] produced a small rim sherd from a blue transfer-printed pearlware plate of 19th- century date and a general purpose iron nail fragment. It also contained two upper valves from oysters and a periwinkle shell, all of which are in fresh condition. Contexts [3] and [9] only produced oyster shell: two and one lower valves respectively. The condition of this shell is similar to that in [5] suggesting a similar deposition date.
- 5.5.4 The finds assemblage is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis and could be discarded.

6.0 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The pot and CBM fragments recovered span the majority of the known date range for the church's existence. However, no artefacts were recovered from the very earliest period established, the 11th-12th century.
- 6.2 The disarticulated skulls recorded in Pit 1 are a common find in churchyards and result from the repeated re-use of the ground for burial. The possibly articulated burial, represented by the skull and articulated upper vertebrae, is of greater interest as it's location on the north side of the church is regarded as less than auspicious (pers. comms. Rev. Father. Russell).
- 6.3 The location and alignment of the northwest to southeast length of mortared flint recorded in Pit 1 corresponds to the location of the former vestry of possible 15th century date (Steer, 1966; 4). However, the depth of the structure recorded is relatively shallow and it therefore seems unlikely that this represents the foundations or walling of a substantial superstructure. It is possible that the masonry may instead be associated with some sort of flooring, which would explain the relatively flat appearance of the upper surface. An interpretation of the less consolidated flint and mortar recorded in the south facing section of the pit is also problematic. It is possible that it may represent a wall footing or could possibly represent collapse following the demolition of the building in that location.
- 6.4 The graveyard soil in Pit 3 provided the earliest residual pot fragment from the 13th – 14th century. Pit 3 also revealed two cuts, the earliest containing two articulated burials, one directly on top of the other, with no visible delineation between them. Fragmentary remains were also present from at least one other individual. The later cut was devoid of human remains and is probably a linear feature of unknown function, possibly dating to the 19th century.
- 6.5 It should be noted that the seemingly homogenous graveyard soils (**3 & 5**) will have been subjected to various degrees of localised disturbance (e.g. the digging of graves or church alterations). Consequently, the layers, cuts and deposits noted in the test pits are equally ephemeral and ill-defined. It is possible, given the nature of the slope upon which the church is sited that some deposits may be made ground or levelling deposits however, they more likely result from continual burial and disturbance to the land over many centuries

7.0 Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the kind hospitality of Reverend Father Roger Russell and residents of the adjoining properties.

8.0 Bibliography

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Elrington. C.R. (ed).1980. The Victoria History of the County of Sussex Vol. 6. Part 1.. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Steer, F.W. (1966) 'Guide to the Church of Coombes: Diocese of Chichester' *Sussex Churches, No. 36* The Regnum Press, Chichester.

Archaeology South-East
Coombes Church, Lancing, West Sussex

SMR Summary Sheet

Site Code	CCL 07					
Identification Name and Address	Coombes Church					
County, District &/or Borough	West Sussex, Adur					
Full 12 Fig. OS Grid Refs.	NGR 519062 108153					
Archaeology South-East Proj. No.	2394					
Type of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	Watching Brief ✓	Standing Structure	Survey	Other
Type of Site	Green Field	Shallow Urban	Deep Urban	Other ✓		
Dates of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	WB. 27-29/9/07	Other		
Sponsor/Client	John D Clarke and Partners					
Project Manager	Diccon Hart					
Project Supervisor	Deon Whittaker					
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	BA	IA	RB
	AS	MED ✓	PM ✓	Other		
<p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p><i>Archaeology South East were commissioned by John D Clarke and Partners to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Coombes Church, Lancing, West Sussex, (centred NGR 519062 108153). Hand excavation of three pits measuring 1.0m² and up to 1.0m deep for installation of a lighting conductor earthing system were monitored. The remains of probably structural mortared flint, two skulls and part of an articulated burial were recovered from the north side of the church in Pit 1, whilst two articulated burials were recorded in Pit 3 and additional, fragmentary remains were recovered from Pits 2 and 3. The earliest artefact was a residual C13th – 14th pottery fragment. A linear feature of unknown purpose was recorded running east to west on the south side of the church in Pit 3.</i></p>						

APPENDIX A - Oasis Summary Form

OASIS ID: archaeol6-43704

Project details

Project name Coombes Church

Short description of the project *Archaeology South East were commissioned by John D Clarke and Partners to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Coombes Church, Lancing, West Sussex, (centred NGR 519062 108153). Hand excavation of three pits measuring 1.0m² and up to 1.0m deep for installation of a lighting conductor earthing system were monitored. The remains of probably structural mortared flint, two skulls and part of an articulated burial were recovered from the north side of the church in Pit 1, whilst two articulated burials were recorded in Pit 3 and additional, fragmentary remains were recovered from Pits 2 and 3. The earliest artefact was a residual C13th – 14th pottery fragment. A linear feature of unknown purpose was recorded running east to west on the south side of the church in Pit 3.*

Project dates Start: 25-09-2007 End: 27-09-2007

Previous/future work Not known / Not known

Any associated project reference codes CCL07 - Sitecode

Type of project Recording project

Site status Listed Building

Current Land use Other 4 - Churchyard

Monument type . None

Significant Finds . None

Investigation type 'Watching Brief'

Archaeology South-East
Coombes Church, Lancing, West Sussex

Prompt Faculty jurisdiction

Project location

Country England
Site location WEST SUSSEX ADUR COOMBES Coombes Church nr Lancing
Postcode XXXXXXX
Study area 1000.00 Square metres
Site coordinates TQ 519062 108153 50.8762617782 0.159418437298 50 52 34 N
000 09 33 E Point
Height OD Min: 16.00m Max: 17.00m

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 Deon Whittaker
Type of sponsor/funding body English Heritage

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No
Digital Archive No

Exists?

Digital Archive recipient Local Museum

Digital Contents 'none'

Digital Media available 'Images raster / digital photography'

Paper Archive recipient Local Museum

Paper Contents 'none'

Paper Media available 'Context sheet','Drawing','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section'

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title Coombes Church nr Lancing West Sussex

Author(s)/Editor(s) Whittaker, D.

Other bibliographic details report No. 2007155

Date 2008

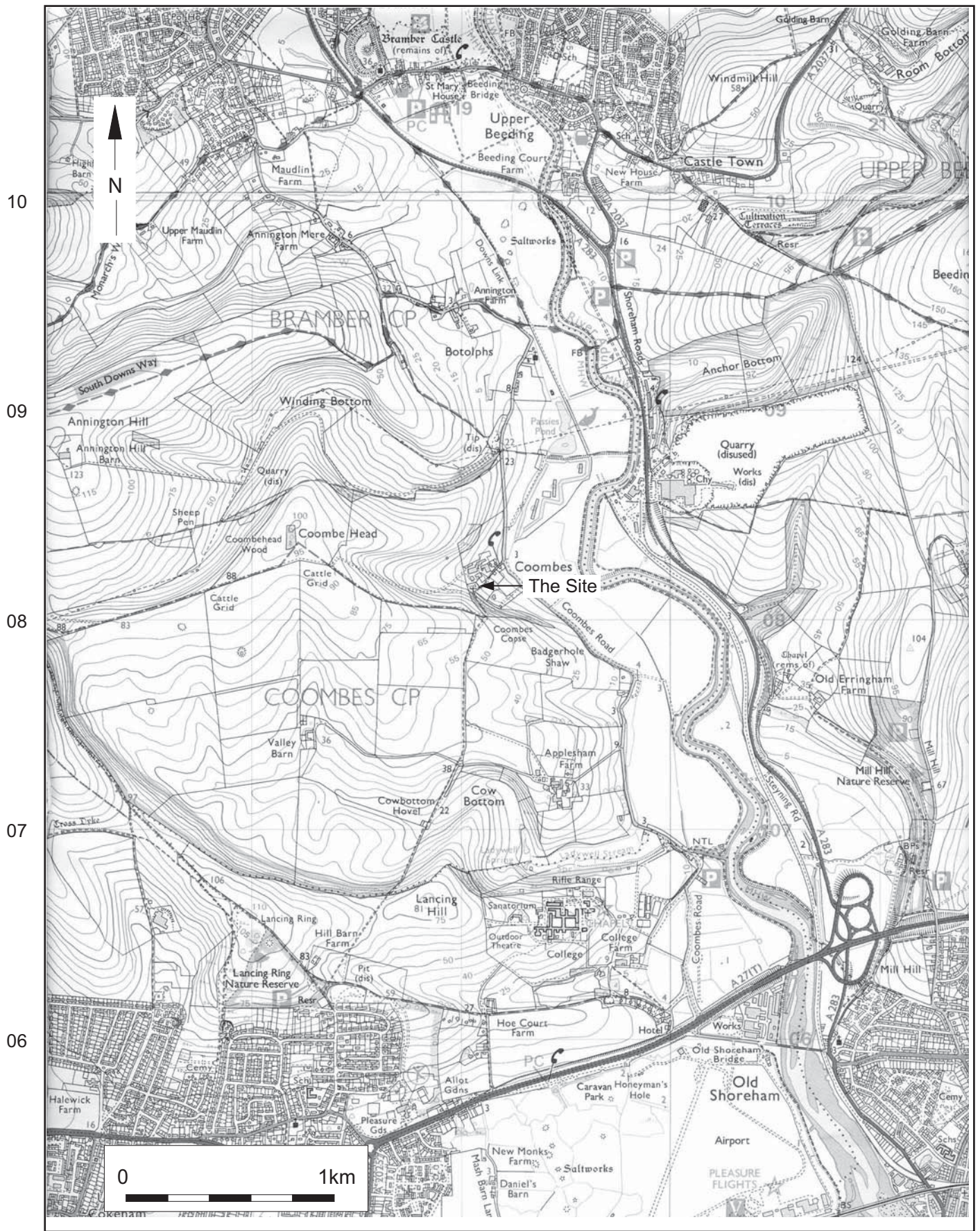
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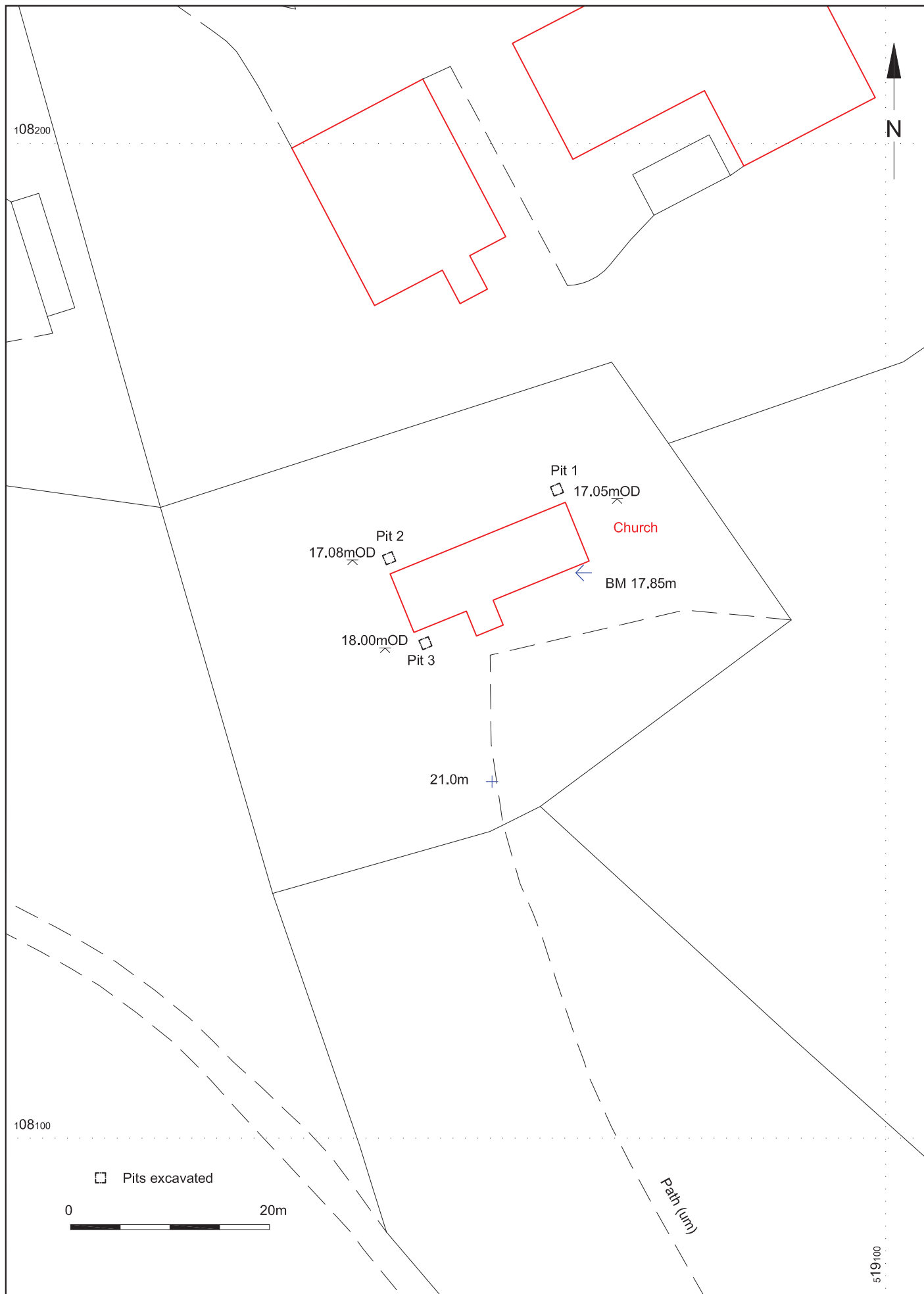
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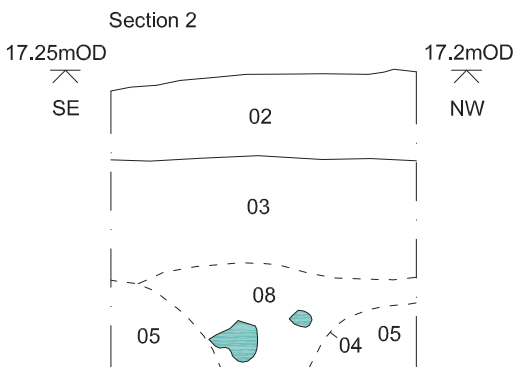
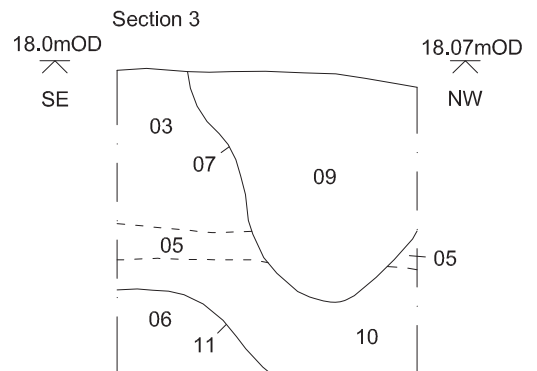
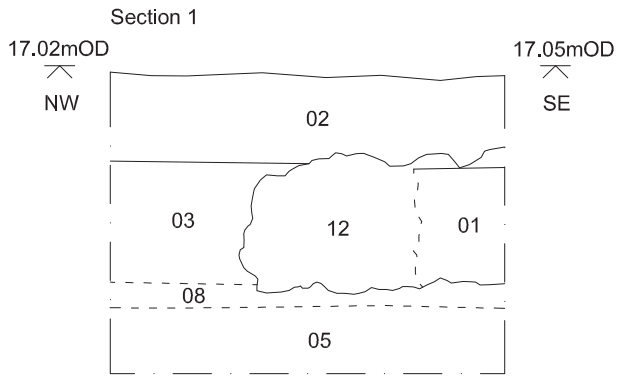
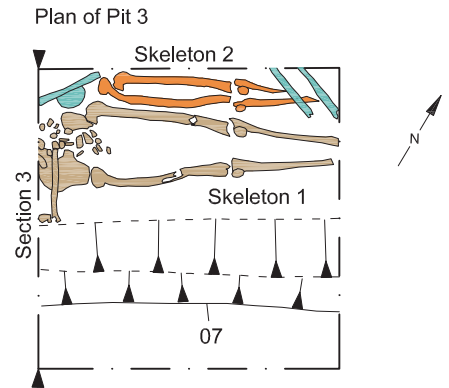
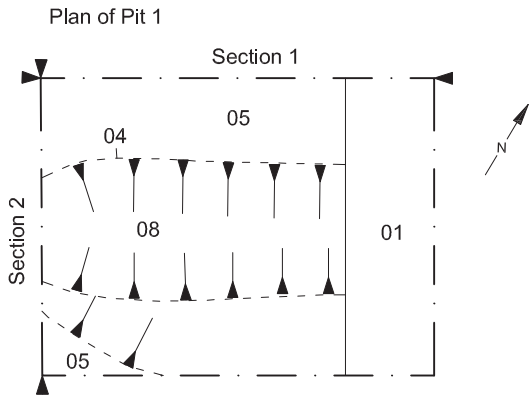


© Archaeology South-East		Coombes Church, Lancing		Fig. 1
Project Ref: 2394	June 2008	Site Location Plan		
Report Ref: 2007155	Drawn by: JLR			

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© Archaeology South-East		Coombes Church, Lancing	Fig. 2
Project Ref: 2394	June 2008	Location of pits excavated	
Report Ref: 2007155	Drawn by: SM		



- Skeleton 1
- Skeleton 2
- Disarticulated bone

