

# EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF THE MINSTER CHAMBERS, SOUTHWELL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.

*by*

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## INTRODUCTION

Between November 1995 and February 1996, a limited excavation was conducted by Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust, on behalf of Southwell Cathedral Council within the grounds of the Minster Chambers, Church Street, Southwell (SK 7013 5387). This report represents a brief summary of the findings.

Prior archaeological evaluations on the site had identified the presence of medieval burials and redeposited occupation material. These findings were supported by documentary evidence which indicated that in 1415 an area to the north-west of the Minster including a portion of the graveyard was given over for the construction of a Chantry Priests' house (Leach 1891, LViii). This building survived until its eventual demolition and replacement in 1819 by the extant Old Grammar School Building (now Minster Chambers).

## EXCAVATION

The excavation followed the demolition of an existing ancillary building prior to the construction of a new visitors' centre. Excavation was limited to the foundations of this new building, up to a maximum depth of 1.2m. The site consisted of an L-shaped area approximately 17 x 24m. Removal of a 0.3m layer of made up ground from the site revealed a range of features dating from the medieval to early post-medieval periods (Fig. 1).

Towards the southern end of the site a number of features produced pottery of a Saxo-Norman date. Among the most significant of this early group of features was a 4m wide north-south aligned ditch (0340), from which a fragment of Roman roof tile was also recovered. To either side of this ditch were

the remains of a possible timber structure in the form of two truncated clay filled, post in trench features (0037 & 0125). Also across the southern half of the site, cut into the top fill of the large ditch and the surrounding red-brown clay loam natural, were approximately 20 individual burials of medieval date. Laid in apparently three phases, these comprised infants and adults, with both sexes represented.

During the late medieval period the northern half of the site had been subjected to a process of terracing and levelling resulting in the redeposition of earlier medieval occupation material across the site (0066 & 0090). Cut through this material were the lias and limestone foundations of a building running back some 18m from Church Street and terminating in a diagonally aligned south wall (0020). It is likely this building would have been timber framed as the narrow width of the foundations appear insufficient to hold anything other than dwarf stone walls. A vertically fed stone drain on the street front (0025) indicates that it had two floors, while robbed out wall foundations (0076, 0078 & 0206) suggest the building did extend westwards.

The interior of the building was partially covered by a destruction layer (0060) containing, structural finds that suggest it may have been a building of some status. These included painted window glass, lead window came, glazed floor tiles, stone roof tiles and glazed ridge roof tile. Also present were fragments of an unusual brick type some 1¼ inches deep by 5 inches wide, possibly one of the earliest brick forms yet found in Nottinghamshire.

The building appears to be late medieval in date, based on the evidence of pottery and structural finds. From the pottery and clay pipes retrieved from post-

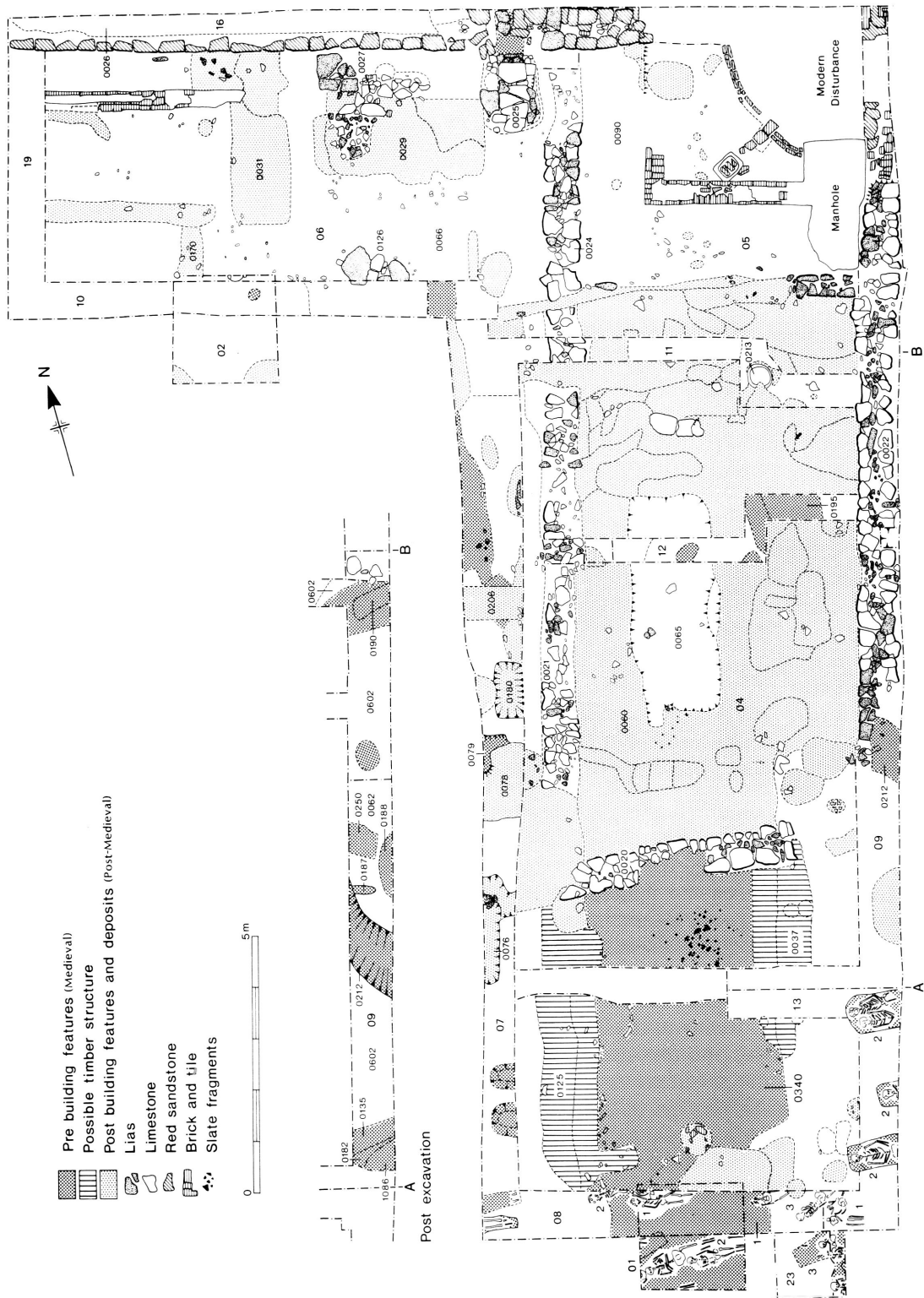


FIGURE 1: Southwell Minster Chambers: composite plan.

medieval pits (0065), and from robber trenches and the destruction layer, the building went out of use in the 16th to early 17th century.

Foundations were also discovered along Church Street of a substantial sandstone ashlar wall (0026) and these may correspond to the boundary wall of the Chantry Priests' house during the 16th to 18th century (as indicated on a plan of the Chantry Priests' house from an original by the architect R.Ingleman, 1819).

Unfortunately the north-east corner of the site had been heavily disturbed by a large brick soakaway and manhole that effectively removed all archaeological evidence at this point.

## CONCLUSION

The quantity and state of preservation of the archaeology discovered exceeded expectations. Previously little physical evidence of Southwell's Saxon-Norman archaeology had been uncovered. As for the identity of the stone foundations of the late medieval building, they appear to be situated to the east of the site of the Chantry Priests' house, in an area that was garden in the 18th century. However, the foundations would at one point have been contemporary with the Chantry Priests' house, possibly even forming an eastern wing of the house, that was perhaps demolished in the 16th Century to make way for the garden.

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