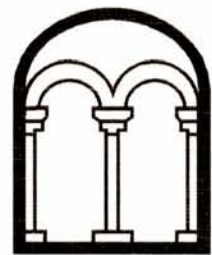


**THE CHURCH OF ST VINCENT  
NEWNHAM  
HERTFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION  
AND INVESTIGATION**

**Albion**  
archaeology



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Project: CVN1730

Document: 2011/96  
Version 1.0

10th August 2011

Compiled by	Checked by	Approved by
Ian Turner	Robert Wardill	Drew Shotliff

Produced for:  
R. J. Pinnock and Son  
on behalf of the  
Parochial Church Council



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by R. J. Pinnock and Son on behalf of the Parochial Church Council to observe building repairs and drainage groundworks at the Church of St Vincent, Newnham, Hertfordshire, and to investigate and record any archaeological remains that were uncovered.

The attendance of an archaeologist had been requested by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA 2011) as a precaution against the discovery of archaeological remains during the building works.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Church of St Vincent lies in the village of Newnham, near Baldock, Hertfordshire and is centred on grid reference TL 24329 37635 (Figure 1).

The Grade II listed building consists of a chancel, nave, south aisle, west tower and porch. The list description reads:

Parish Church, some of nave walling possibly C12. Chancel rebuilt or lengthened early C13; S aisle and W tower c.1340 or earlier. 1420-40 repairs by John of Wheathampstead, Abbot of St. Albans, probably including E window, stair turret and S porch. Renovated 1881. Clunch rubble masonry with dressed stone visible on stair turret. Cement rendered with incised lines to imitate ashlar. Roof not visible, tiles on S porch. Nave: 3 bays. N wall has chamfered arched blocked entrance to right and to left a single square headed C15 window of two cinquefoiled lights - this the only window in the Church without a C19 label mould. Three square headed two light C15 clerestorey windows above. Similar S clerestorey. Chancel: N wall has two simple early C13 lancets. E window of C15 form: three lights below unusual tracery. S wall with small doorway between 2 windows of 2 trefoiled lights and pierced heads. S aisle: blocked window on E wall, 2 windows with C19 tracery on S wall. C15 two light window on W wall. S porch: C15 four centred arch entrance under a square head with mask label stops and moulded reveals, blank shields in quatrefoils in spandrels. 2 light trefoiled windows on E and W walls of porch. Tower: tall 2 light cinquefoiled window with pierced head under pointed arch to W wall. Four bell chamber 2 light trefoiled windows under square heads. Semi octagonal stair turret. Two stage angle buttresses to tower. Two stage diagonal buttresses on chancel and S aisle with similar straight buttresses to N wall and S aisle. Battlemented parapet throughout over string course; chancel parapet added C19. Interior: chancel arch; two chamfered orders, no responds. S arcade has 4 bays with octagonal shafts, moulded bases and capitals, pointed arches of two chamfered orders. Tower arch with similar details plus label. N and S walls of tower carried on arches springing from W wall and return of tower arch. Door to stair turret in SE corner of tower. Chamfered arch entrance from S aisle to S porch under segmental rear arch. Plank door with two wrought iron strap hinges in situ, probably C15. S porch roof with C15 roof timbers; moulded principals, purlins and collars, brattished cornices with timber carved angels to E and W. Remains of wall paintings survive on N wall: late C15 St. Christopher opposite entrance. Fragments of wheel design to right. To E of eastern nave window a hooded figure; also a consecration cross of unusual form on SE face of stair turret. C15 octagonal font at W end of nave with panels of cusped quatrefoils enclosing blank shields on bowl and cinquefoil headed panels on shaft. Some quarries of C15 glass in W window of S aisle and in S clerestorey. Two brass memorials at E end of chancel. (VCH 1923. Pevsner 1977. E. Clive Rouse *The Newnham Murals* 1963).



### 3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The building works that required monitoring comprised:

- the replacement of the nave roof covering;
- the replacement of an extant French drain with an improved version, incorporating two drain runs and soakaways within the cemetery north of the church (Figure 2).

Trench 1, the French drain replacement trench, ran along the north wall of the chancel and tower. It was 18.81m long, 0.60m wide and 0.65m deep. Trenches 2 and 4, the pipe trenches running to soakaways, were 7.85m and 6.54m long respectively and were both 0.35m wide and 0.55–0.75m deep at the soakaway end. Trenches 3 and 5, the soakaways themselves, were each 1.60m long, 1.20m wide and 1.30m deep.

### 4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring took place on 7th, 13th and 14th June 2011. The methods employed during the project complied with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (1999), English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991), and Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (2001).

All of the excavation work was carried out by hand by the building contractor under archaeological supervision. Exposed features and deposits of archaeological interest were cleaned and investigated where necessary by the supervising archaeologist.

Observations and measurements were recorded on *pro forma* recording sheets and a digital photographic record was made of the works.

### 5. RESULTS

#### 5.1 *The nave roof*

After removal of the roof materials an inner skin of relatively recent boarding was revealed. This boarding was judged to be in sound condition by the builders and was not removed; thus no roof timbers were exposed during the works.

#### 5.2 *Observations along the north wall of the nave and tower*

##### *Lower and upper nave wall*

The exposed lower north wall of the nave (105) in Trench 1 (Figure 3) widened outwards slightly and comprised slightly larger pieces of sandstone than the upper wall. The oval blocks were 130–400mm long and 90–130mm thick, random coursed and had been recently re-pointed with hard grey-white cement mortar, probably when the previous French drain was added. The base of the wall was not exposed and it was unclear whether more substantial foundations existed at a lower level.

It was observed that the lower nave wall had been cut through at four points along its length in order to fit ceramic pipes which ran back into the church. It was suggested by the builder that this had been done to provide ventilation beneath the pews. The cuts to the wall around the pipes had been made good with mid grey-yellow bricks (107) which were 220mm long and 68mm high.



The builder cemented up these pipes during the current works as it was thought that they were the likely cause of the worsening damp within the church — water had clearly been running back into them since the creation of the first French drain.

The upper wall (106) comprised oval sandstone blocks that were 40–120mm long and 70–140mm thick. They were random coursed and had been re-pointed with hard white-grey cement mortar.

#### ***Tower foundations and wall***

The exposed tower foundations at the western end of Trench 1 comprised mid grey-yellow bricks (109) in regular courses. They were 230mm long and 70mm thick and had been recently re-pointed with hard grey-white cement mortar.

Above the brick foundation was a course of chamfered stone blocks (110). Above this the construction method was unclear as the tower had been rendered in a cement plaster with incised lines that imitated stone blocks in an ashlar form.

#### ***Buttresses***

At the eastern end of Trench 1 the foundations of Buttress 1 were of stone blocks (111), the lower courses of which were masked by recent re-consolidation with concrete which surrounded and squared off the base.

To the west, the foundations of Buttress 2 comprised oval sandstone blocks (108) that were 150–220mm long and 70–80mm thick. The foundations had been recently re-pointed with hard grey-white cement mortar. Above this the construction matched that of the tower — a course of chamfered stone blocks (110) below a rendered surface of incised cement plaster that imitated stone blocks in an ashlar form.

At the western end of Trench 1 the foundations and upper construction of buttress 3 was the same as that of the tower.

### ***5.3 Layers present across the area***

#### ***Topsoil***

The topsoil (300) was dark brown grey silt containing occasional bone, modern (post-1750) brick and roof tile fragments and occasional small stones.

#### ***Subsoil***

Beneath the topsoil was a subsoil layer (301) which was probably the original topsoil. The deposit was mid brown-grey sandy clay with occasional small stones. The layer contained occasional modern brick and roof tile fragments and yielded a residual grey ware pottery sherd (6g) of early Roman date.

#### ***Undisturbed geological strata***

The underlying geology (101, 301) consisted of light yellow-white clay silt with patches of chalk and patches of gravel. It was visible beneath the subsoil layer in Trenches 2, 3 and 5, at a depth of 0.55–0.68m below ground level.

### ***5.4 Medieval burial***

A simple supine burial of probable medieval date (304) was found aligned WSW-ENE (head to the west) in Trench 3 at a depth of 0.75m below the ground surface



(Figure 3). The burial was exposed in the trench from the skull to approximately half way down the femurs; the remainder of the skeleton lay to the east beyond the side of the trench. The upper part of the skeleton was disturbed by the machine bucket during the excavation of Trench 3. The grave cut [303] had vertical sides and a flat base; it was at least 1.05m long and 0.42m wide and had been backfilled with mid grey-brown sandy silt (305).

No coffin remains were present in the burial and the narrow grave cut and location of the finger bones — outstretched over the upper legs — are suggestive of a shroud burial. The grave fill contained seven sand-tempered pottery sherds (52g) of 12th to 13th-century date, suggesting an early medieval date for the burial. Six vessels are represented; individual sherds were moderately abraded and largely undiagnostic. The skeleton was re-buried in Trench 2.

### **5.5 Probable pit**

A probable pit [306] was observed in section in the west side of Trench 3. Most of this feature was located beyond the side of the trench. The feature appeared to be oval or circular in plan with vertical sides and a flat base, measuring at least 1.10m wide and 0.60m deep. It contained mid orange-brown sandy silt with moderate charcoal flecks (307) and yielded three sand-tempered pottery sherds (10g), representing two vessels datable to the 12th to 13th centuries. All sherds were moderately abraded and the largest had a sooted exterior, indicating use. An unworked piece of clunch (23g) was also present.

Although it remains possible that the feature is a grave cut, it is judged to be a pit because: a) no bone was observed in the feature despite its being partly truncated during machining; b) the shape in plan did not appear to be linear; c) the feature's alignment would be at odds with the other recorded graves. The purpose of the pit is not known.

### **5.6 Other burials**

Three probable graves [203], [205] and [207], aligned WSW-ENE, were observed in Trench 2. No bone was observed because the bottom of the graves was not reached by the trench which was 0.55–0.74m deep. However the grave cuts were clearly visible, defined by their mid grey-brown clay silt deposits against the background of the light yellow-white clay silt geology. Their date is not known. However, the fact that they are not recorded on the church's grave map and the similarity of their alignment to grave [303] and regular spacing is suggestive of a medieval date.

Trench 4 did not penetrate below the subsoil and, although further graves may exist in this area, none were identified at this level.

Soakaway Trench 5 did not contain any archaeological features.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

There was little discernable difference between the lower and upper north aisle wall. The base of the wall was not reached and it is not known if more substantial foundations existed below the limit of Trench 1.

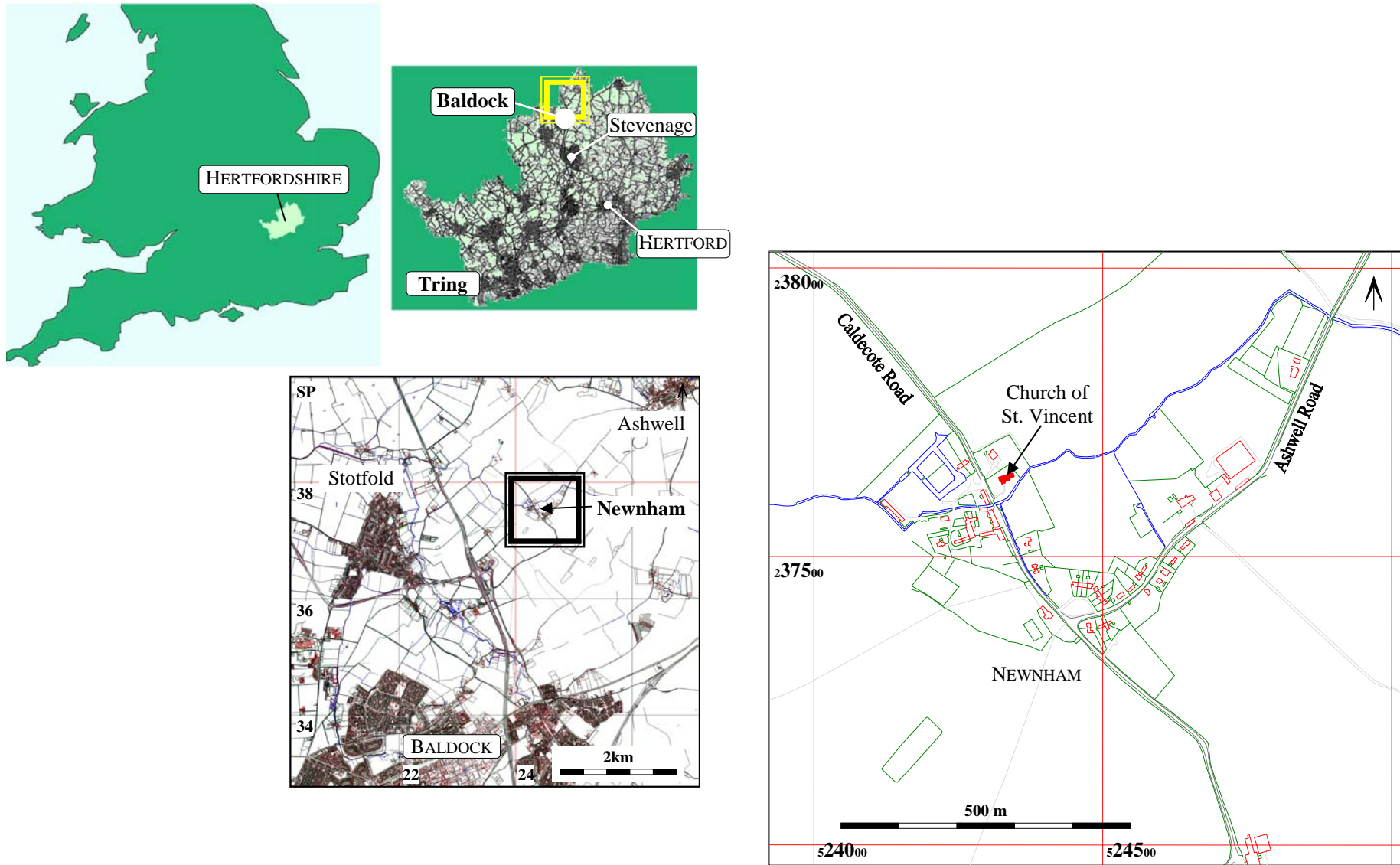


The monitoring of the groundworks revealed one burial of probable medieval date and the presence of three further graves which do not appear on the church's grave map.

The three graves which were parallel with, and equally spaced from, the medieval burial may also be of the same period. A pit of unknown function identified immediately west of the medieval burial is likely to be of medieval date.

## **7. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

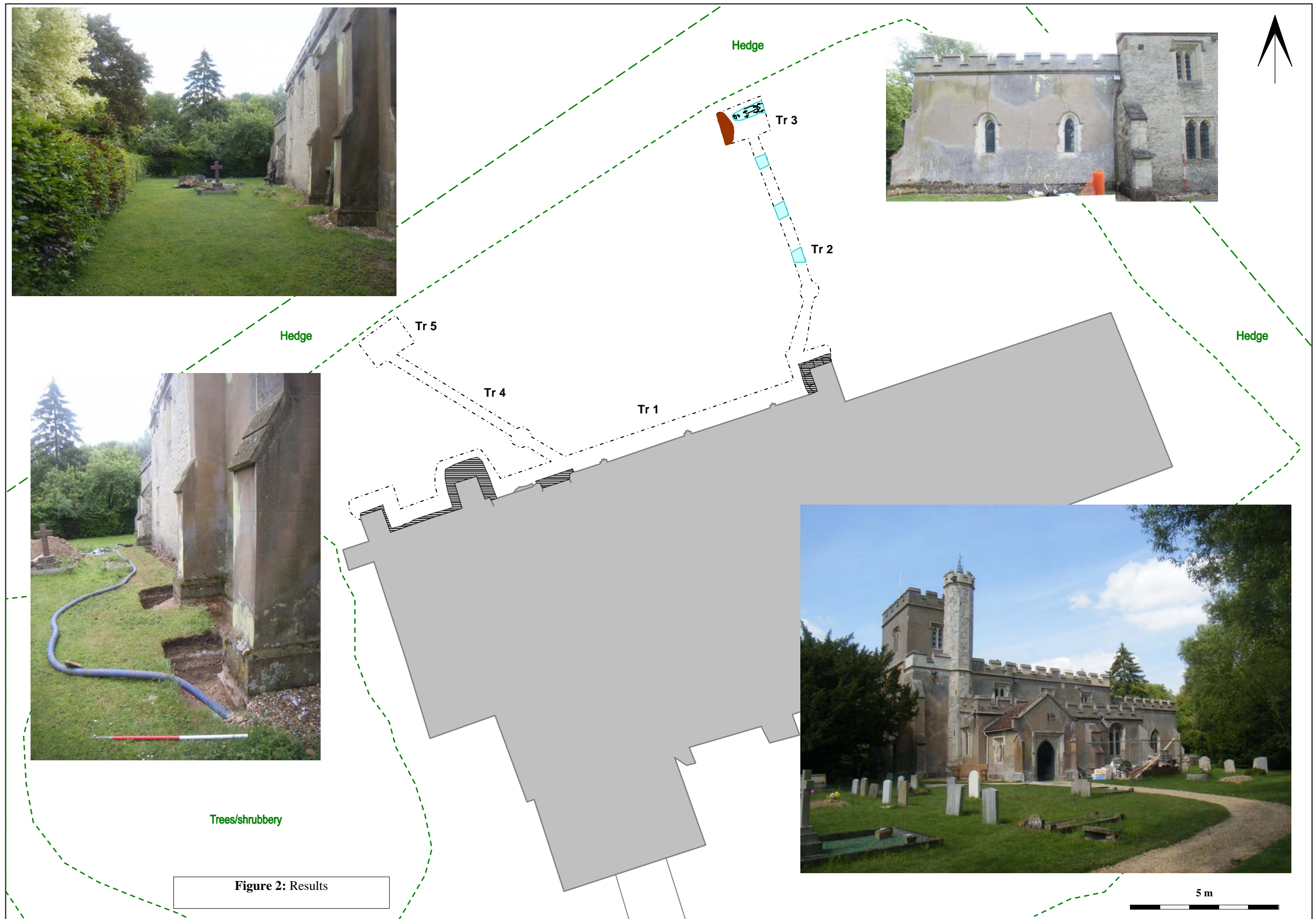
DAA 2010. *Brief for Archaeological Investigation, Recording and Reporting at the Church of St Vincent, Newnham, Herts.*



**Figure 1: Site location plan**

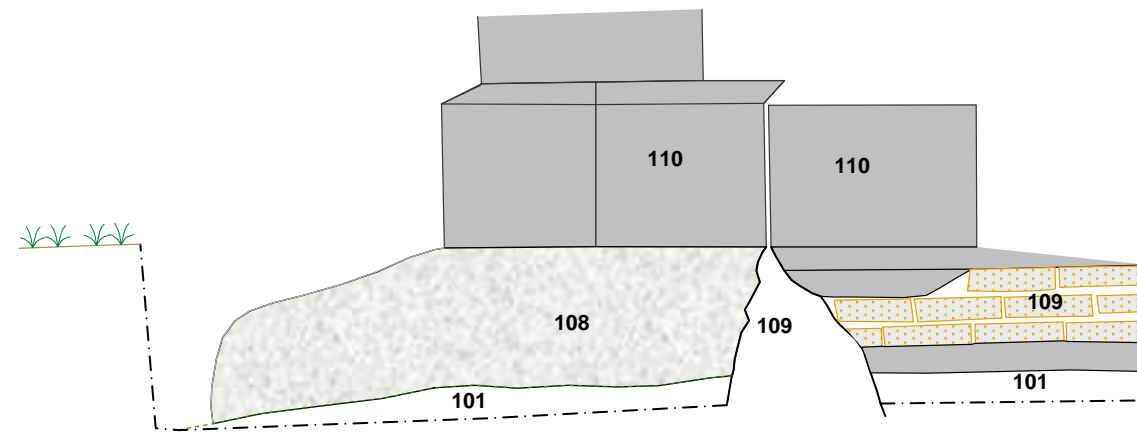
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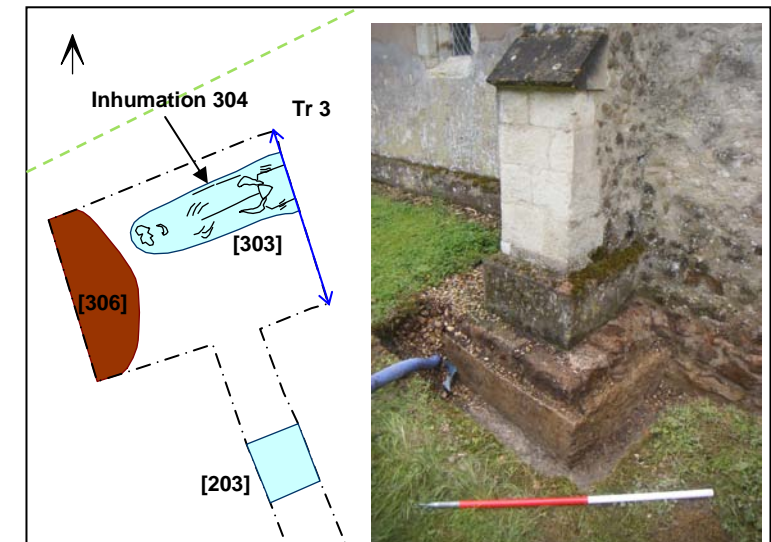
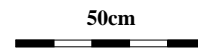




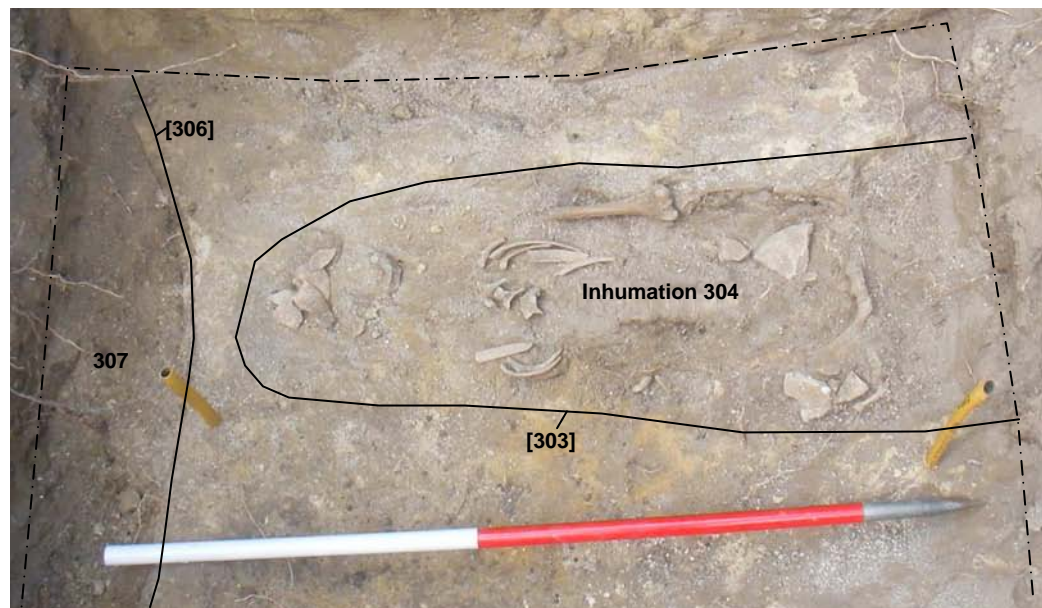
Trench 1. Buttress 2. Scale 1m



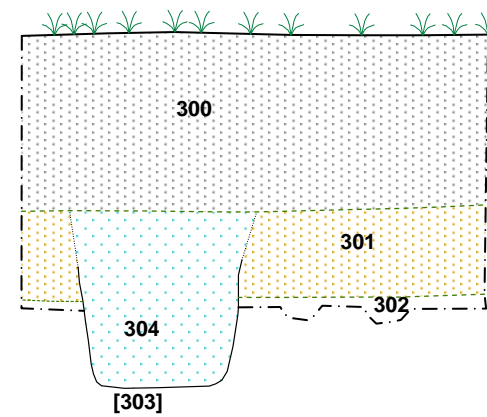
Trench 1. Section across Buttress 2



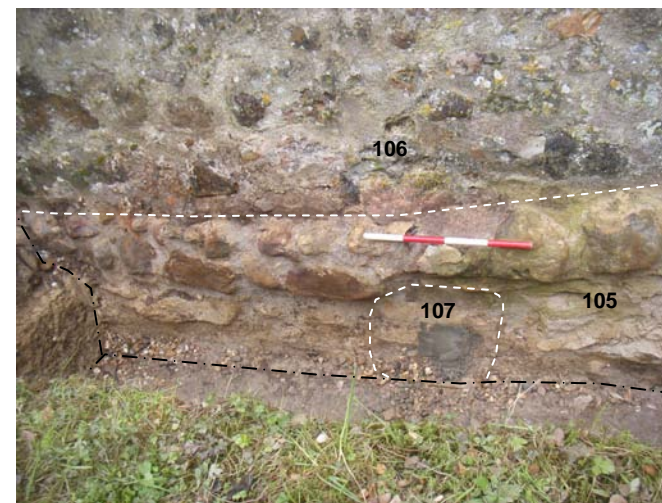
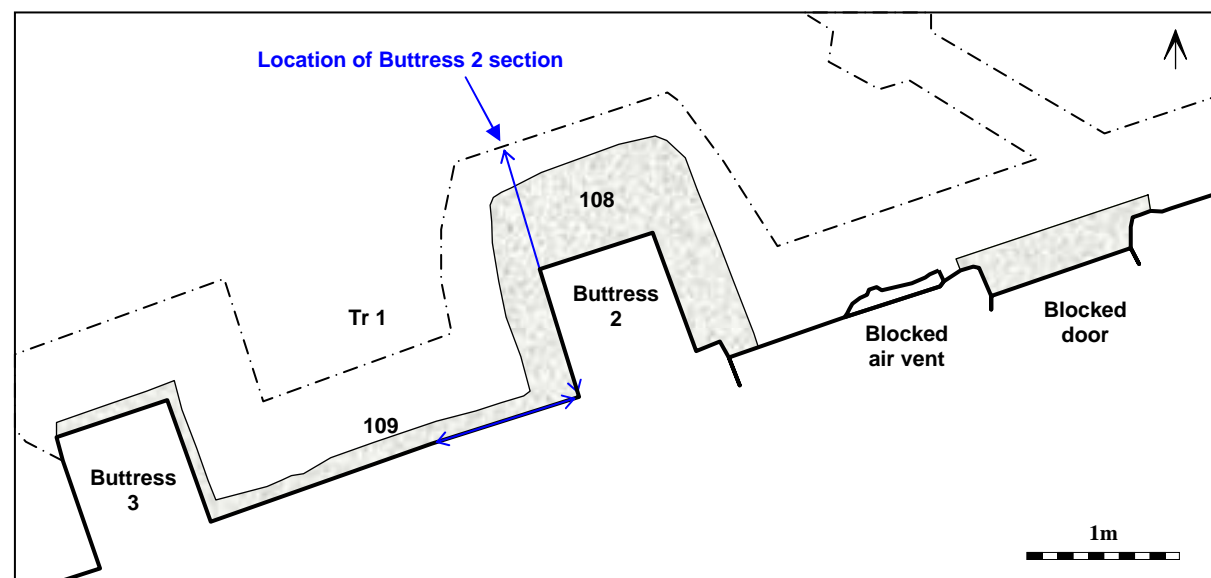
Trench 1. Buttress 1. Scale 1m



Trench 3. Inhumation and pit. Scale 1m



Section through grave [303] and Trench 3



Trench 1. Wall foundations beside Buttress 1. Scale 40cm

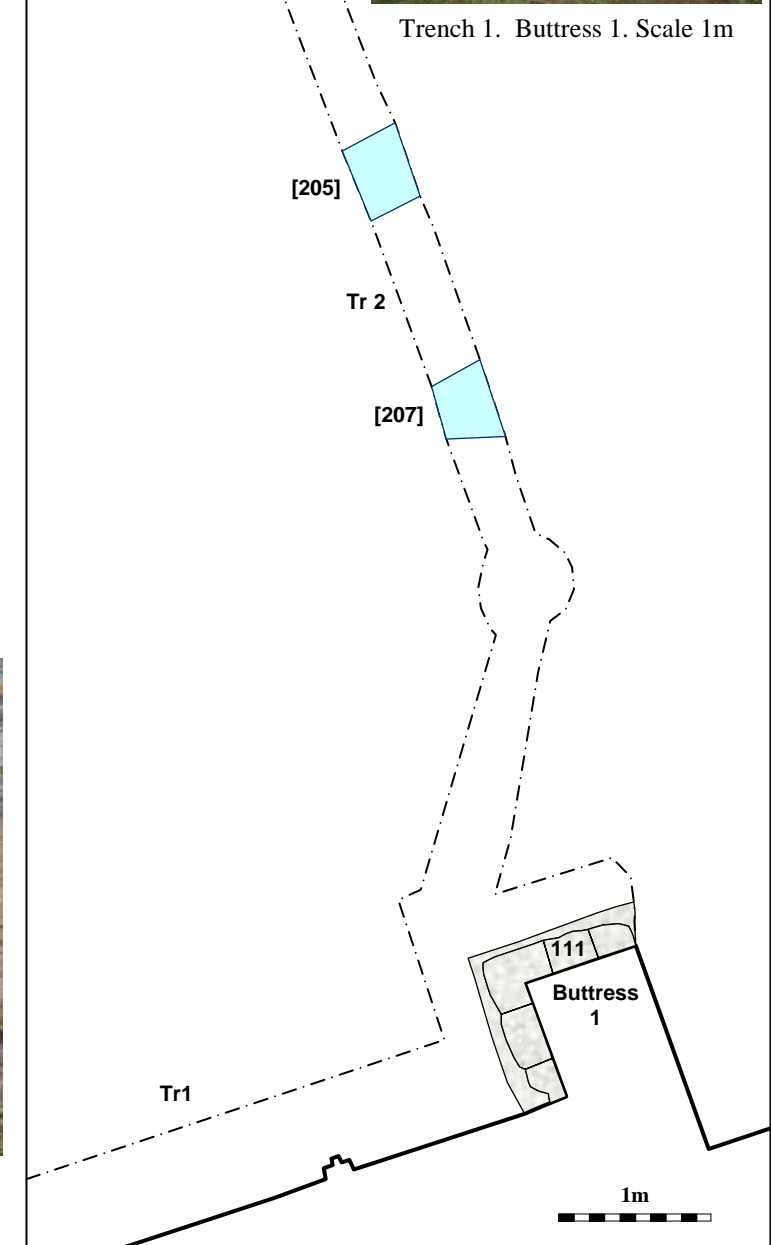


Figure 3: Feature detail and selected sections

Central  
Bedfordshire

Albion  
archaeology



Albion Archaeology  
St Mary's Church  
St Mary's Street  
Bedford  
MK42 0AS

**Telephone** 01234 294000  
**Email** [office@albion-arch.com](mailto:office@albion-arch.com)  
[www.albion-arch.com](http://www.albion-arch.com)

