

**CHURCH OF ST MARY
STEVINGTON
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION,
RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION**

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Compiled by	Checked by	Approved by
Marcin Koziminski	Mark Phillips	Drew Shottliff

Produced for:
Bruce Deacon
Architect Ltd

on behalf of
The Church of St Mary PCC



1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Bruce Deacon, Architect Ltd on behalf of The Church of St Mary Parochial Church Council to oversee groundworks associated with drainage works at the church in Stevington, Bedfordshire 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) as a precaution against the discovery of archaeological remains during the building works.

All work was carried out in accordance with a design brief issued by the DAA (2011).

The archaeological observation and recording was undertaken by Marcin Koziminski. The report was written by Marcin Koziminski with a section on artefacts by Jackie Wells and figures by Joan Lightning.

2. BACKGROUND

The Church of St Mary is located in the north part of Stevington, known as Church End, at the north end of Church Road, centred on grid reference SP990536 (Figure 1).

The church is listed at Grade I and it consists of a chancel, ruined aisles, nave with aisles and north and south porches, and west tower. The west tower below belfry level is the earliest surviving part of the building and is of Saxon origin, whereas the nave, both aisles and north and south chancel chapels belong to the 14th century.

The building is described in Victoria County History Bedfordshire III (1912) with a phased plan.

Archaeological recording was undertaken in 1988 during drainage works. Examination of the foundations provided further evidence for the development of the building. It was demonstrated that the north aisle had been widened and the north porch overlay foundations of an earlier porch (Dawson and Baker 1990).

3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The purpose of the works was to introduce a toilet and refreshment facilities in the church and to insert a new electric cable and a water pipe and also to construct a trench-arch drain to the north of the north porch.

The works inside the church involved reduction of the floor level in the north-west corner of the north aisle (Figure 2), while groundworks in the graveyard comprised:

- Trench 1: machine excavation of the service trench around the south-west and west part of the church and a drain pipe trench from the north-west corner of the church towards the north-east;



- Trench 2: machine excavation of the trench-arch drain at the end of the drainage pipe to the north of the north porch (Figure 2).

The geological strata were not revealed in any part of the trenches.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring of the groundworks was undertaken between 27th and 28th September 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 Research Projects in the Historic Environment (2006), ALGAO East's Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (2003) and Albion Archaeology's Procedures Manual (2001).

Plans and sections were drawn and a digital photographic record was made of the works and all significant features. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence. A detailed description of all deposits is contained in the Appendix.

In accordance with the DAA's brief and Taking Care of Human Remains (2000), issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans in 2000, all human bone was reburied securely on site.

A copy of this report and the project archive, which comprises all written and photographic records, will be stored at Bedford Museum. Copies of the report will also be forwarded to the Historic Environment Record located at Borough Hall, Bedford, and the OASIS online database.

5. RESULTS

Plans and a section of the observations are shown in Figure 2.

5.1 Inside the Church

The floor level in the north-west corner of the north aisle was reduced by *c.* 0.15m over an area of 1.7 x 3.4m (Figure 2). This revealed a previous concrete floor level underlying the existing tile floor. No other works took place that would impact upon either sub-surface archaeological remains or the fabric of the church.

5.2 Trench 1

5.2.1 South-west and west of the church

A water pipe and electric cable trench, 29m long, 0.3–0.4m wide and 0.7m deep was dug from the south porch, along the west wall towards the north-west buttress of the church (Figure 2).

The deposits within the trench consisted of approximately 0.2m of topsoil (1) above graveyard sub-soil (4), which was 0.5m thick at formation level. Both deposits were disturbed by existing tarmac surface (2) and modern drain trench [7] that runs around the church.



Human remains observed in this part of the works consisted of a reasonably high number of disarticulated bones within the trench (approximately 6-7kg). The disarticulated bone included eight fragments of skulls, indicating a number of re-deposited burials. The remains were associated with a mixture of finds represented by clay tobacco pipe, sherds of pottery and mortared brick fragments.

5.2.2 West and north of the north porch

A drain pipe trench 10m long, 0.5m deep and 0.3m wide was machined from the north-west buttress of the church towards the north-east (Figure 2).

The stratigraphy comprised the same deposits described in section 5.2.1, excluding the tarmac surface (2).

Only a small amount of human bone was observed in this part of Trench 1 (c.0.5kg), mainly small fragments.

5.3 Trench 2

The arch-drain trench was situated to the north of the church. It was 7.5m long, 1.0m wide and c. 0.5m deep.

The deposits within the excavations consisted of approximately 0.22m thick topsoil (5) above a graveyard sub-soil (6) (Figure 2).

Human remains observed in this part of the churchyard consisted of a relatively small number (c. 1.5kg) of disarticulated bones. Again, the remains were accompanied by a small quantity of mixed artefacts (see below).

5.4 Artefacts

Artefacts were recovered from subsoil deposits (4) and (6), and comprise six pottery sherds (98g), ceramic roof tile (115g), a floor tile (270g) and two pieces of post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem (5g).

The earliest pottery is a shell-tempered bowl rim of St Neots-type ware (fabric B01), datable to the Saxo-Norman period. Four sherds of 12th–13th-century shelly ware (fabric B07) were recovered, likely to derive from production centres in the vicinity of Harrold (Beds.) or Olney (Bucks.). Forms are a jar (diameter 160mm) and jugs, represented by a rim (diameter 100mm) and a strap handle with slashed decoration. One body sherd has sooted surfaces, suggesting use as a cooking pot. A small micaceous sand-tempered sherd of late medieval/early post-medieval date (fabric E03) was also recovered.

Ceramic building material comprises two pieces of medieval shell-tempered flat roof tile, and a sand-tempered fragment of post-medieval peg tile. A sand-tempered floor tile (thickness 29mm) with a worn surface and mortared edges and underside was identified. The latter is of uncertain date, but is likely to be of post-medieval or later origin.

The artefacts will be returned to the church warden.



6. CONCLUSIONS

No *in situ* burials were found in any of the trenches. The highest quantity of disarticulated human remains occurred next to the west end of the church, suggesting that this part of the graveyard may have been used more intensively.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

DAA 2011. *Brief for Archaeological Investigation, Recording and Reporting at the Church of St Mary, Stevington, Bedfordshire.*

Dawson M and Baker D 1990, *St Mary the Virgin, Stevington, Bedfordshire: Observations during construction of a French drain* (unpublished report by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service)



APPENDIX: CONTEXT / TRENCH SUMMARY



Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 39.00 m. Width: 0.40 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.2 m. Max: 0.3 m.

Co-ordinates:

Reason: Electric cable, water pipe and drain pipe trench.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
1	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick deposit with medium rooting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Tarmac	Hard dark grey frequent small stones 0.10m thick. Between SW buttress and southern porch of the church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Subsoil	Friable mid brown grey silty sand occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-large stones At least 0.50m thick deposit of mixed grave soil. Contained moderate amount of small to large limestone. Medium rooting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Drain	Curving linear sides: vertical base: flat dimensions: max breadth 0.85m, max depth 0.2m Modern drain pipe trench around the church - cut into topsoil (1).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Backfill	Loose mid grey sandy gravel frequent small-medium stones 0.20m thick deposit - backfill of modern drain pipe around the church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: 7.50 m. Width: 1.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.2 m. Max: 0.22 m.

Co-ordinates:

Reason: Arch drain trench.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
5	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-large stones 0.22m thick deposit. The same as (1).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Subsoil	Friable mid brown grey silty sand occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-large stones At least 0.32m thick deposit of mixed grave soil. Contained moderate amount of small to large limestone, heavily rooted. The same as (4).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

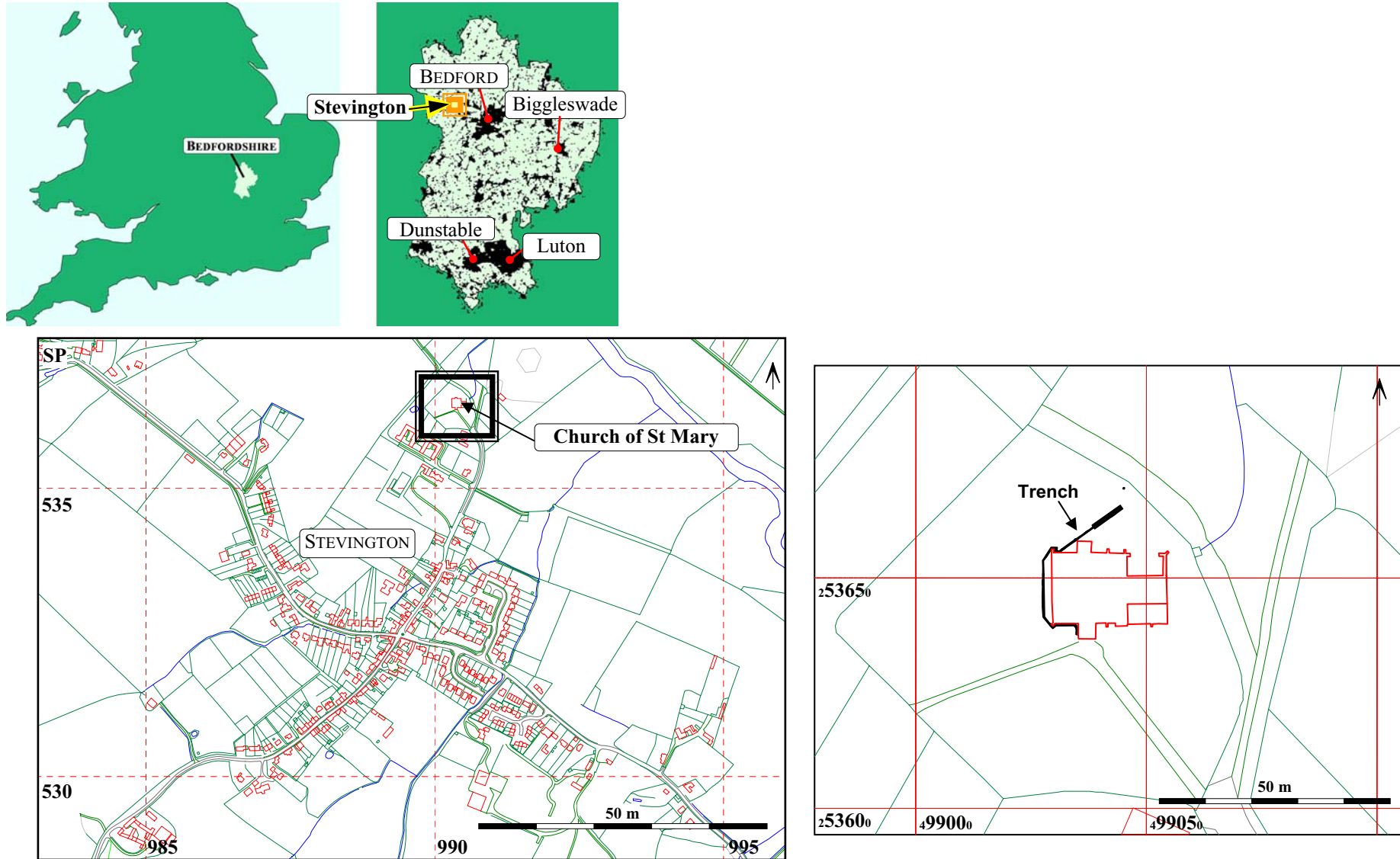
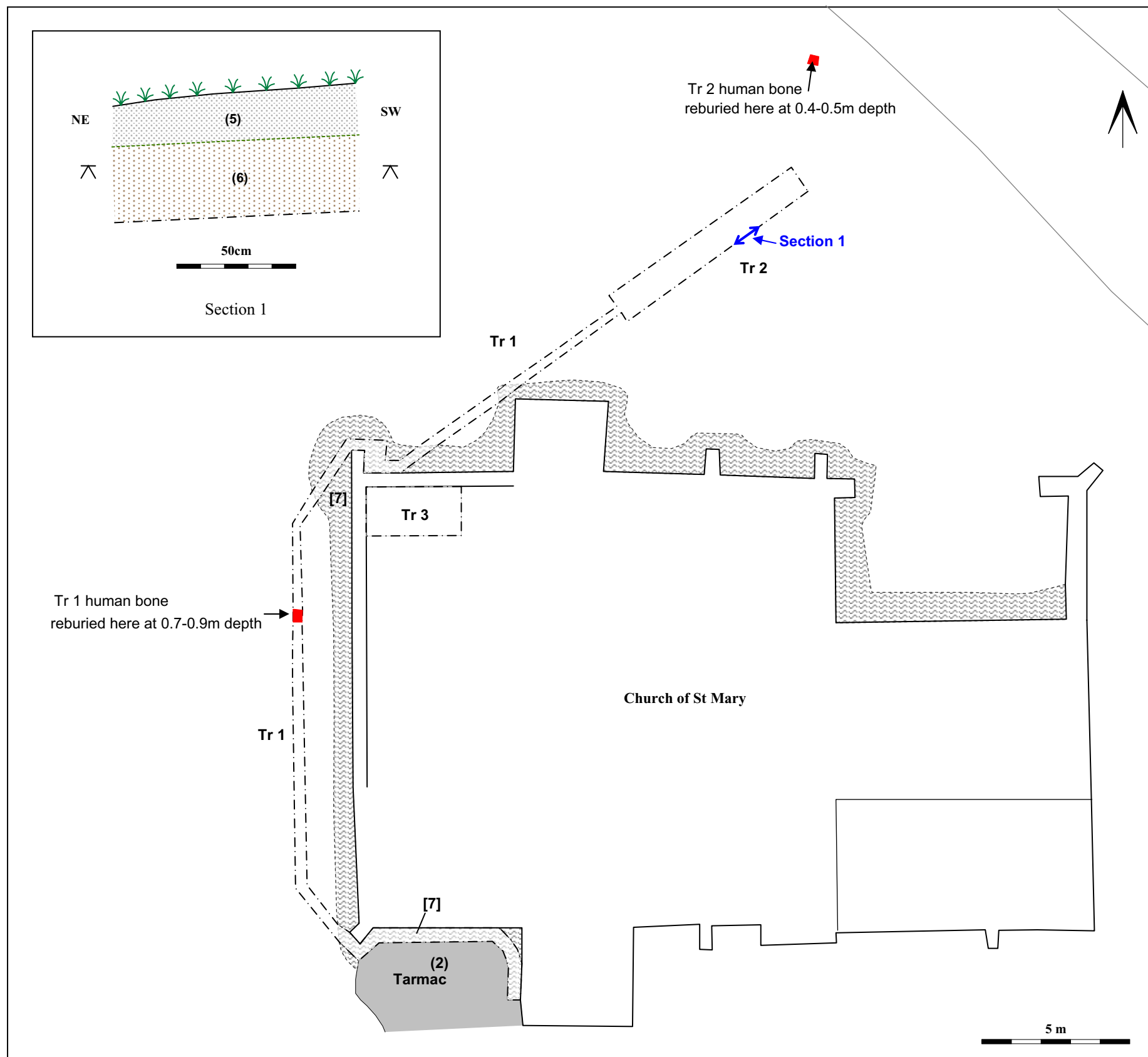


Figure 1: Site location plan

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Trench 3



Section



Trench 2

Figure 2: All features