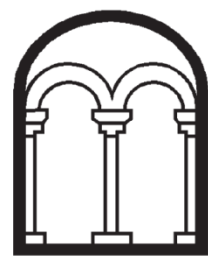


**ST PETER'S CHURCH
SHARNBROOK
BEDFORDSHIRE**

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

Albion
archaeology



**ST PETER'S CHURCH
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION,
INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND
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Contents

List of Figures 2

List of Images 2

Preface 3

Version History 3

Key Terms 3

Non-Technical Summary 4

1. INTRODUCTION 6

 1.1 Background to the Project..... 6

 1.2 Archaeological Background 6

 1.3 Historical Background of the Church 7

 1.4 Geological Background..... 8

 1.5 Description of Development Works..... 8

 1.6 Project Objectives 8

 1.7 Methodology 9

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING 10

 2.1 Introduction 10

 2.2 Trench 1: French Drain Trench..... 10

 2.3 Trench 2: Soakaway Pit South of Chancel..... 14

 2.4 Trench 3: Soakaway Pit North of Tower 15

 2.5 Trench 4: Soakaway Pit South of Tower..... 16

 2.6 Artefacts..... 18

3. DISCUSSION 19

 3.1 Structural Evidence..... 19

 3.2 Burials 19

 3.3 Artefacts..... 20

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY 21



5. APPENDIX 1: LIST DESCRIPTION 22

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Site location plan
 Figure 2: Plan showing location of all works
 Figure 3: Plan of Trench 1
 Figure 4: Plan of Trenches 2, 3 and 4
 Figure 5: Trench profiles A to C
 Figure 6: Trench profiles D and E

List of Images

- Image 1: General view of south side of church
 Image 2: Trench 1. East wall of south porch, left end
 Image 3: Trench 1. East wall of south porch, right end
 Image 4: South aisle
 Image 5: Trench 1. South aisle between porch and central buttress
 Image 6: Trench 1. South aisle, central buttress, looking north-east
 Image 7: Trench 1. South aisle, central buttress, looking north-west
 Image 8: Trench 1. South aisle, eastern bay
 Image 9: Trench 1. South aisle, foundation pad at east end
 Image 10: Trench 1. Reused medieval grave slab
 Image 11: East end of south aisle
 Image 12: Trench 1. South-east corner of south aisle
 Image 13: Trench 1. East end of south aisle, left end
 Image 14: Trench 1. East end of south aisle, right end
 Image 15: South wall of chancel
 Image 16: Trench 1. Chancel, left end
 Image 17: Trench 1. Chancel, looking north-east
 Image 18: Trench 1. Chancel, looking north-west
 Image 19: Trench 1. Chancel, looking west
 Image 20: Trench 1. Human bone (105)
 Image 21: Trench 2. Upper layer of burials (203), (204) and (205)
 Image 22: Trench 2. Lower layer of burials (206) and (207)
 Image 23: Trench 2. Fully excavated
 Image 24: Trench 3
 Image 25: Trench 3.
 Image 26: Trench 3. Burial (304)
 Image 27: Trench 4. Looking north-east
 Image 28: Trench 4. Upper layer of burials
 Image 29: Trench 4. Upper layer of burials, (403) and (404)
 Image 30: Trench 4. Lower layer of burials, (405) and (406)

The figures and images are bound at the rear of the report.



Preface

All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and was prepared solely for the benefit of the client. The material contained in this report does not necessarily stand on its own and should not be relied upon by any third party. This document should not be used for any other purpose without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and the prior written authority of Albion Archaeology (a trading unit of Central Bedfordshire Council). Any person/party relying on the document for such other purposes agrees and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Albion Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Albion Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the persons/party by whom it was commissioned. This document is limited by the state of knowledge at the time it was written.

Archaeological monitoring works were undertaken by Mark Phillips (Project Officer). The report and figures were prepared by Mark Phillips. Artefact analysis and reporting is by Jackie Wells (Artefacts Officer). The project was managed on behalf of Albion Archaeology by Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

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Key Terms

| | |
|--------|--|
| Albion | Albion Archaeology |
| CIfA | Chartered Institute for Archaeologists |
| DAA | Diocesan Archaeological Advisor |
| HER | Historic Environment Record |
| NHLE | National Heritage List England |
| PCC | Parochial Church Council |



Non-Technical Summary

St Peter's Church, Sharnbrook is a grade I listed building; its fabric dates mainly to the 13th to 15th centuries, and it was restored in the mid-19th century.

In order to remedy damp problems a scheme was devised for the Sharnbrook Parochial Church Council (PCC) by the Victor Farrah Partnership (architects). The scheme of works comprised drainage improvements to the tower, south aisle and chancel and internal plaster repairs to the south aisle. The works were permitted by a faculty issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans.

As the proposed drainage works could impact on potential archaeological remains there was a requirement for a programme of archaeological works. Guidance on the nature of the required works was provided by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA). This guidance identified the main points of archaeological sensitivity as: construction evidence in the footings exposed by the excavation of the French drain; human remains likely to be encountered in the new drain-runs and soakaways away from the church. Albion Archaeology was commissioned to undertake the archaeological works, which took place between 9th October and 19th November 2019.

Recording of foundations in the French drain trench showed that the south porch and south aisle have foundations which are similar in character, with a narrow offset foundation in small to medium-sized rubble and roughly squared limestone blocks. The foundations of the chancel are very different in character, with a much wider offset up to 450mm wide in large rubble blocks. Differences in the masonry show that the south aisle and chancel belong to different phases of construction; however, extensive repair works to the masonry of the chancel have obscured the relationship between the aisle and chancel.

Later alterations were noted in the foundations and walls. An expanded foundation slab at the south-east corner of the south aisle may represent later repair. This foundation included part of a reused 13th-century grave cover on which one arm of a cross with a trefoil terminal was visible. At the west end of the chancel foundation offset had been partly removed by later activity associated with a deposit of disarticulated bone. The lower part of the chancel walls show evidence of extensive repair works, probably as part of the mid-19th-century restoration. A heavily weathered drip moulding or basement moulding appears to have been trimmed flush with the face of the wall and the section of wall below the moulding was refaced with ashlar masonry.

A small amount of disarticulated bone was found during the excavation of the trenches, including a concentration of disarticulated bone adjacent to the south wall of the chancel. In-situ burials were found during the excavation of the three soakaway pits. Investigation showed evidence of inter-cutting burials with some disarticulated charnel material. The two soakaway pits excavated to the south of the church contained at least two sequential layers of burials.

The depth of burials varied between 740mm for the shallowest and approximately 1m for the deeper burials, with the presence of limestone bedrock at around 1m deep



probably a significant factor. A deeper grave cut, partially exposed in the north-east corner of Trench 3, was probably later in date, possibly late-19th-century, if related to nearby memorials. Based mainly on the presence or absence of coffin nails, the burials appeared to be a mixture of coffined and un-coffined. The majority of the burials produced no dating evidence. A wrought iron coffin handle associated with a burial in the upper part of Trench 4 indicates a broadly post-medieval date. A similar coffin handle and copper alloy studs of the type used to decorate coffins during the 18th and 19th centuries were found in association with a concentration of disarticulated bone in Trench 1.

Artefacts were recovered from the 'grave earth' deposit during archaeological hand excavation. These comprised 17 sherds of pottery and one fragment of clay pipe stem. The earliest pottery is a single late Roman sherd; the majority is dated to the Saxo-Norman period (10th-12th century) and the early medieval period (12th-13th century); with one other sherd dating from the late medieval period (14th-15th century).



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background to the Project*

St Peter's Church, Sharnbrook is a grade I listed church; its fabric dates mainly to the 13th to 15th centuries, and it was restored in the 1850s (Figure 1).

In order to remedy problems with damp a scheme was devised for the Sharnbrook Parochial Church Council (PCC) by the Victor Farrah Partnership (architects). The scheme of works comprised drainage improvements to the tower, south aisle and south chancel and internal plaster repairs to the south aisle.

The works were permitted by a faculty issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Albans. As the proposed drainage works could impact on potential archaeological remains there was a requirement for a programme of archaeological works. Guidance on the nature of the required works was provided by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA). This guidance identified the main points of archaeological sensitivity as:

- Construction evidence in the footings exposed by the excavation of the French drain.
- Human remains likely to be encountered in the new drain-runs and soakaways away from the church.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the archaeological works in conjunction with the drainage works. The archaeological fieldwork was completed between 9th October and 19th November 2019.

1.2 *Archaeological Background*

The church is a grade I listed building (NHLE 1160824). The earliest surviving fabric in the building dates from the 13th century; see list description in Appendix 1.

There are three other listed structures in the churchyard:

- On the north side of the churchyard is a grade II, cast-iron 'kissing' gate, c.1850 by Williams of Bedford (NHLE 1321480).
- In the churchyard, to the west of the church is the grade II Magniac Mausoleum, a large rectangular structure, elaborately decorated with marble inlays (NHLE 1114373). It was designed by William Burges and erected in 1870.
- East of the church, the grade II gate to St Peter's Close is an early 18th-century wrought-iron gate, made for Sharnbrook House but relocated to the churchyard in the 1960s (NHLE 1160854).

Previous archaeological investigations carried out at the church comprise:



- Archaeological monitoring undertaken in 1992 during the laying of a heating pipe from the north side of the church, across a footpath to the west end. No significantly archaeologically deposits were identified.
- Archaeological evaluation and monitoring and building recording in advance of the construction of a new parish room on the north side of the church. The investigation identified 19th-century brick-lined burial vaults and some probably earlier but undated burials. (Albion Archaeology 2005).

The church is located within the inferred extent of the medieval core of the village of Sharnbrook (HER 16946)—represented by the historic settlement focussed on the High Street with the church adjoining the western side of this area.

A scheduled monument (NHLE 1012363) located 400m to west of the church is a medieval moated site. It consists of an oval-shaped moated enclosure in a wooded area called Castle Close.

1.3 Historical Background of the Church

1.3.1 Documentary sources

Descriptions of the building can be found in the *Victoria County History* (Page, 1912, 88–94), Pevsner (O'Brien & Pevsner, 2014, 279–80) and Harvey (1872–78, Vol.2, 468–77). The list description is given at the end of the report in Appendix 1.

Various primary sources are examined in *Bedfordshire Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Pickford, 2000, 627–37). These include a glebe terrier of 1822, Archdeacon Bonney's historical notes (c.1820–40) and visitation notebook (1823–1839), an article by W.A. published in 1854, parish records and a variety of other sources. These provide a fairly detailed account of developments in the 19th century.

1.3.2 Building history

The building consists of: western tower with a spire; nave with north and south aisles, and north and south porches; chancel and a north chapel.

It is possible that the building originated in the Saxo-Norman period; however, the earliest surviving fabric dates from the 13th century. This comprises the three eastern bays in the north and south arcades and the chancel arch. The north and south aisles, therefore, must originate at this time. The chancel probably contains fabric of a similar date but has been much altered.

Fourteenth-century additions comprise the tower with the westernmost bay of the nave arcades and the north chapel.

Fifteenth-century fabric comprises: the spire, north and south porches, and a number of the windows that were replaced at this time.



It was noted in an 1854 article written by an individual identified by the initials W.A. (later identified as John Martin, librarian at Woburn Abbey) that the chancel had been recently repaired (Pickford 2000, 628).

Restoration of the main body of the church took place between 1855 and 1858, overseen by the Bedford architect Thomas Jobson Jackson (Pickford 2000, 628). Kelly's Directory notes that "the church was partially rebuilt and reroofed in September, 1855, by subscription" (1890, 116).

The tower and spire were restored in 1881-2 by W. Talbot Brown of Wellingborough (Pickford 2000, 629).

1.4 Geological Background

No superficial deposits are recorded on the north side of Church Lane in the area of the churchyard. On the opposite side of Church Lane the superficial deposits consist of Biddenham Member sand and gravel which was formed in the Quaternary Period through fluvial processes¹.

The bedrock consists of Blisworth Limestone Formation, sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 166 to 168 million years ago in the Jurassic Period.

1.5 Description of Development Works

The groundworks consisted of a French drain against the base of the walls and three soakaway pits in the churchyard (Figure 2).

The French drain extended along the south side of the chancel, the south aisle and around the tower. These trenches were dug to a depth of up to 700mm, exposing the church foundations.

The soakaway pits were dug at distances of between 5m and 6m from the building, with one located south of the chancel and two more to the north and south of the tower. Plastic crate type soakaways were installed in the pits to take runoff from the French drains. The pits were approximately 1.4m deep.

1.6 Project Objectives

The purpose of the archaeological investigation was to make a full record of any archaeological remains impacted by the drainage works and to place them within their cultural and environmental setting. The specific aims of the archaeological work were to:

- monitor all groundworks that had the potential to reveal archaeological remains;
- investigate the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of archaeological deposits encountered within the groundworks.

¹ Contains British Geological Survey materials © NERC 2020.



- pay particular attention to ensuring minimal disturbance of any articulated human remains encountered during groundworks.

1.7 Methodology

The trenches excavated next to the church walls for the installation French drains were hand-dug by the building contractors. Following the opening of the trench the foundations and other structural details were subject to archaeological recording by Albion Archaeology staff.

Machine-excavation of the soakaway pits was carried out under archaeological observation. Machine excavation was suspended when human remains were identified. The remains were then excavated and recorded by Albion Archaeology staff before being lifted. Human remains were stored on site before being reburied during the course of works within the trenches, as close as possible to where they were found; the presumption being against disturbance of burials unless unavoidable and in favour of immediate appropriate reburial. No specialist osteological assessment was carried out on the remains. Due to the limited extent of the trenches the remains were generally partially rather than completely exposed and were also undated. Details of the burials are noted in the description of the monitoring works, and illustrated in the site plans and selected photographs.



2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

2.1 Introduction

Archaeological monitoring was carried during construction of a French drain (Trench 1) extending from the east side of the south porch to the south-east corner of the chancel; and also during the construction of soakaway pits to the south and north of the church (Trenches 2 to 4). Trenches to link the French drains to the soakaways were excavated without monitoring as these shallow, narrow trenches were unlikely to impact on any intact archaeological deposits, being mostly in the mixed upper topsoil layer. A trench for a French drain around the tower was excavated and backfilled without an opportunity for archaeological monitoring.

2.2 Trench 1: French Drain Trench

This trench was excavated for the construction of a French drain, extending from the south porch to the south-east corner of the chancel (Figure 3). The trench was hand-dug by the building contractors and was recorded when opened. A section of the trench next to the chancel was subject to archaeological excavation where a concentration of human bone was present. The trench was approximately 25m long, 600–700mm deep and 560–900mm wide.

2.2.1 Structural observations

The walls were examined for evidence of the structural sequence and repairs or restoration, to relate this to the evidence of the foundations uncovered in the trench itself. Observations were recorded as measured and annotated field sketches at locations along the trench. The field sketches have been translated into scale drawings (Figures 5 and 6) with their locations indicated on plan (Figure 3, A to E).

The masonry in the south porch and the south aisle is fairly consistent. Both have a similar offset rubble foundation, the masonry in the walls is similar with a plain chamfer and moulded drip course running through at the same height (Figure 5-A, Image 3). The masonry of the south porch abuts that of the south aisle and the uppermost course in the foundations of the porch extends over the foundation for the south aisle.

Construction of the central buttress in the south aisle appears to be integral with the wall (Figure 5-B, Images 6 and 7). The foundation of the wall and the foundation pad of the buttress are at the same level. Although it has been affected by later masonry repairs, there are indications, particularly on the east side of the buttress, that its construction is integral with the wall.

The foundations of the south aisle included a widened foundation pad at the east end of the south wall (Figure 5-C, Images 9 and 10). This widened foundation incorporates large flat slabs of stone, with at least one re-used 13th-century grave slab. It was not clear whether the expanded foundation formed



part of the original construction or was a later addition, but the second explanation would seem more likely.

The masonry in the south aisle and chancel differs in character, indicating these belong to separate construction phases (Figure 6-D). At the junction of the south aisle and chancel the masonry in the lower part of the walls has been repaired, which has obscured the relationship. Higher up, on the east end of the south aisle a narrow, vertical strip of masonry at the extreme right-hand edge of the wall presumably indicates the south aisle abutting masonry forming the south-east corner of the nave.

The stonework in the lower part of the chancel shows evidence of extensive restoration work (Figure 6-D and E, Images 16 and 17). Near the base of the wall is a plain chamfer course, that was renewed or added during restoration works judging from its condition. Above the plain chamfer are two courses of rectangular ashlar blocks, also part of restoration works. Above these is a badly weathered course of stone that appears to be the remains of a moulded drip course or plinth moulding. At its west end, where it has been subject to less weathering, it has the remains of a projecting bead moulding on its upper edge above a concave dressed surface. The lower half of the stones appear to have been cut back to make them flush with the face of the wall below, presumably during the later restoration works. Higher up the wall, level with the base of the windows, is a narrow projecting drip course. Its condition indicates it is part of the later restoration, but weathered stones remaining at its east and west ends show that it was a renewal of an existing moulding.

2.2.2 Layers

Various layers were observed in the south side of the trench. The trench was up to 700mm deep below the ground surface at its deepest point. No undisturbed geological deposits were found in Trench 1.

The layers observed in the south side of trench were:

- **(100) Topsoil:** The upper *c.*150mm of the soil profile consisted of a dark grey, relatively stone-free topsoil and turf layer.
- **(101) Grave earth:** Deep layer of fairly homogenous, dark yellow-brown silty soil seen throughout the areas investigated. This is a layer of anthropogenic origin, formed by reworking of the soil profile over a period of centuries through the continued reuse of the site for burial.
- **(102) Cobbled surface:** Buried surface observed in the section of trench located alongside the south aisle. Rounded pebbles form a cobbled surface with its upper boundary *c.*150mm below the present ground level. Represents a former ground surface or path adjacent to the south side of the church.
- **(103) Limestone rubble layer:** Probable construction debris layer observed next to south aisle. Consisted of mixed layer with soil and



medium-sized angular fragments of limestone. The deposit was located adjacent to and above the remains of brick vault (104). It represents probable construction debris, but may have been associated with earlier drainage works as glazed ceramic drain pipes were encountered in the trench by the building contractors.

2.2.3 Trench 1: Foundations

The wall foundations observed in the trench are described below and illustrated in plan in Figure 3.

- **(107) South porch, east wall:**
This foundation consists of a plain offset, at a depth of 350mm below ground level (Images 2 and 3). It is constructed from roughly squared-off limestone blocks with at least three courses visible in the trench. The offset projects 100mm at the north end of the wall, 130mm at the south end and is flush with the wall in the central section. The foundation abuts the foundation of the south aisle, with the uppermost course of the offset extending over the foundation offset of the south aisle.
- **(108) South aisle, south wall:**
This foundation is a plain offset at a depth of 440mm below ground level (Images 5–8). The offset projects between 100mm and 200mm. It is fairly regular in appearance, made from unshaped and roughly squared limestone blocks with at least two courses visible. The central buttress appears to be integral with the wall; on the east side of the buttress where the foundations could be seen clearly these were tied in with construction of the wall foundations.
- **(109) South aisle, foundation pad at south-east corner:**
The buttress on the eastern end of the south aisle is supported by an expanded foundation pad (109). This is an irregular, stepped foundation which extends up to 900mm from the face of the wall (Images 8–10). The wider, lower part of the pad consists of unshaped limestone blocks. On the west side of the buttress, the upper part of the foundation is made of large flat limestone slabs. The uppermost slab appears to be a reused medieval grave cover (Image 10). This is a rectangular slab with finely dressed surfaces. It is partially embedded in the wall and buttress and has minimum dimensions of 780mm long by 225mm wide. The southern side of the stone is intact, while the west end has some damage but may be the original edge. Decoration on the visible part of the stone consists of a three-lobed terminal, extending up to the southern edge of the stone. This is likely to be one arm of a cross.
- **(110) South aisle, east wall:**
The foundations for the east end of south aisle (110) are in coursed rubble limestone masonry, mostly thin slabs of stone (Images 12–14). There are two narrow offsets in the foundation: an upper offset at or just



above the present ground level and a lower offset *c.*240mm below ground level.

The upper offset is *c.*70mm wide at the south (left) end of the wall, 120mm at the north (right) end, and diminishes in the central section where it is flush with the wall. The lower offset occurs only on the south (left) end of the wall and is just over 2m long and up to 70mm wide.

Evidence for the sequential relationship between the south aisle and chancel is unclear. The coursing of the masonry and the heights of the offsets, chamfer and drip courses in the two walls differ. The evidence is complicated by the fact that the masonry of the chancel has been subject to extensive repairs or alterations at some time, probably during the mid-19th-century restoration works. Where the two walls meet the plinth of the south aisle has a disturbed section of masonry at the junction, possibly resulting from the alterations to the chancel wall.

- **(111) Chancel, south wall:**

The foundations for the south wall of the chancel are quite substantial, being significantly wider than those for the south aisle.

Two sections of the foundation have been affected by later activity. A small section of the foundation was removed on the east side of the central buttress when a brick drain gully was constructed, probably during the late 19th or early 20th century. At the west end of the chancel approximately 3m of the foundations have been removed in an area that contained an assemblage of disarticulated human bone (105 and 106).

The chancel foundations consist of a wide stone footing beneath an irregular band of rubble at the base of the wall. The wider section is 270mm below ground level and extends 350–450mm from the face of the wall. It is faced with unshaped limestone blocks up to *c.*600mm long. It is possible that the upper part of the foundation has been disturbed by later activity, resulting in its very irregular appearance.

2.2.4 Trench 1: Burial-related evidence

There was no evidence of *in situ*, undisturbed burials in the area immediately next to the walls in the trench for the French drain. However, the edge of what appeared to be a burial vault and some disarticulated bone was found.

- Brickwork (104) seen in Trench 1 is likely to be part of an arch covering a burial vault (Images 6 and 7). The brickwork was exposed in the south side of the trench where the trench went around the central buttress of the south aisle. It consisted of at least two courses of brick, with the bricks set end-on and leaning at a slight angle towards the north. The arrangement of the bricks suggests that they form the northern edge of an arched vault, constructed in header bond. The



brickwork extended beyond the limits of the trench to the south, east and west and its extent is not known. Today there are no headstones or memorials in the area immediately east of the south porch. However, historic views of the church from the south-east (Page, 1912, 88, and images in the Henman Collection in Bedford Central Library) show the area enclosed by railings, suggesting the presence of a family vault or burial plot.

- A concentration of disarticulated human bone (105 and 106) in Trench 1 was found near the west end of the chancel (Image 20). The deposit comprised adult bones and coffin fittings (105) and a discrete cluster of neonate or infant bones (106). The identifiable adult bones comprised: humerus x2, femur x2, a scapula, some ribs and a single vertebra; they could represent elements from a single disturbed burial. Coffin fittings were represented by an iron coffin handle and a small number of copper alloy studs. The neonate bones, although forming a discrete cluster, appeared to be incomplete and disarticulated.

2.3 Trench 2: Soakaway Pit South of Chancel

This trench was excavated to install a plastic crate soakaway. It was located approximately 7m to the south of the chancel (Image 23). See Figure 2 for location and Figure 4 for detailed plans of burials. The trench was 1.25 long by 1.1m wide with a finished depth of 1.4m.

The uppermost layer (200) was a dark silt turf and topsoil layer, 100–150mm thick. Beneath the topsoil the soil consisted of a homogenous layer of mid-yellow-brown sandy silt (201), *c.* 1.1m thick. This is a ‘grave-earth’, soil that has been continuously reworked through the burial process over hundreds of years. The initial machine excavation of the trench was stopped when articulated human remains were observed and excavation continued by hand digging. A number of burials were identified (see below), but no individual grave cuts were identified in the grave earth.

2.3.1 Trench 2: Upper level of burials

The uppermost burials in this trench were found at a depth of 740–800mm below the ground surface (Image 21). They consisted of the lower part of two burials (203 and 204) in the western half of the trench and the upper part of another (205) in the eastern half.

- Burial (203) comprised lower leg and foot bones. The bones were in a good state of preservation. In the tibia the proximal epiphyses were unfused.
- Burial (204) comprised lower leg and foot bones. In the tibia the proximal epiphyses were fused (the distal end was not well preserved); the tibia was 360mm long.
- Burial (205) comprised the head and upper torso with the skull and mandible found in the mid-part of the trench. The teeth were in good



condition, not heavily worn. Although not shown on plan the left humerus and chest was *in situ*, but obscured when planned by a layer of soil containing disarticulated charnel material, including a femur over the chest area of the burial and fragments of pelvis and skull immediately north of the burial.

- A small amount of disarticulated bone was recovered at this level towards the northern edge of the trench, including the distal end of a femur and a vertebra.

2.3.2 Trench 2: Lower level of burials

Further burials (206 and 207) were located at a depth of 900–940mm below the ground surface (Image 22).

- Burial (206) was an adult skeleton located at a depth of 900mm next to the southern edge of the trench. The left arm, torso and upper legs were within the limits of the trench. The bones were in a good state of preservation. The left femur was 460mm long.
- Burial (207) consisted of a radius and ulna (lower arm) found at a depth of 940mm in the northern side of the trench, probably indicating an *in-situ* burial beyond the northern limit of the trench.

2.3.3 Trench 2: Base of trench and geological deposits

Following hand excavation of *in-situ* burials (see above), machine excavation was undertaken below a depth of 900mm. Some human bone was recovered but it is not clear if this was from *in-situ* burials or disarticulated remains. The grave earth gave way to a layer of mid-red-brown sandy gravel (202) at a depth of 1.2m, which continued down to the finished depth of the trench at 1.4m (Image 23). This appears to be undisturbed geology, probably part of the Biddenham Member sand and gravel superficial geology, which has been recorded to the south of Church Lane.

2.4 Trench 3: Soakaway Pit North of Tower

This trench was excavated for the installation of a plastic crate soakaway. It was located approximately 10m north of the tower (Image 24). See Figure 2 for location and Figure 4 for detailed plan of burials. The trench was 1.35 long by 1.2 m wide and 1.2m deep.

The soil profile in this trench comprised: topsoil (300) a dark silt topsoil layer 100–150mm thick; ‘grave earth’ (301), a fairly homogenous deposit of dark yellow-brown silty soil with occasional small to medium-sized stones; and limestone bedrock (302) at a depth of 1m below the ground surface.

2.4.1 Trench 3: Burials and grave cuts

This trench contained comparatively few burials, with the southern half of the trench showing no evidence of burials. Two burials (304 and 307) were found at a depth of *c.*1m below the ground surface and a later grave cut [305] could be seen in the north-east corner of the trench (Images 25 and 26).



- Feature [305] is interpreted as a grave cut. It was visible in the north-east corner of the trench as a near vertically-sided feature with a clearly distinguishable fill (306) of dark brown silty soil with frequent small limestone fragments. The cut was visible from near the top of the trench, down to the base of the trench where it partially truncated an earlier grave cut [303]. Grave [305] extended below the formation level of the trench and any burial in the grave must be at a deeper level and remained undisturbed by the works. The distinctive nature of the fill of this feature, with numerous limestone fragments, suggests that the grave had been deeply cut into the underlying limestone bedrock.
- Burial (304) in grave [303] was found at depth of 1.05m below the ground surface. The grave had been dug slightly into the underlying bedrock and appeared to extend around 500mm beyond the skull. The upper left arm of the burial had been partially truncated by the later grave cut [305]. The well-preserved skeleton comprised skull, upper arms and torso. The teeth were heavily worn. The right humerus was 312mm long. No nails were found around the head end of the grave; this together with the slightly irregular outline of the grave suggests that (304) was probably an un-coffined burial.
- Burial (307) was represented by articulated arm bones (humerus, radius and ulna) in north-west corner of trench, indicating an in-situ burial located mostly beyond the northern limit of excavation.

2.5 Trench 4: Soakaway Pit South of Tower

This trench was excavated for the installation of a plastic crate soakaway. It was located *c.*7m south of the tower (Image 27). See Figure 2 for location and Figure 4 for detailed plans of burials. The trench was 1.4 long, 1.3m wide, with a finished depth of 1.4m. During machining the location of the trench was shifted to avoid a possible burial, resulting in a shallow step at the north end of the trench.

The soil profile in this trench comprised: topsoil (400) a dark silt topsoil layer 100–150mm thick; ‘grave earth’ (401), a fairly homogenous deposit of dark yellow-brown silty soil with occasional small to medium-sized stones; and limestone bedrock (402). Some limestone bedrock survived at a depth of *c.*1m along the northern and southern edges of the trench; elsewhere it appeared to have been truncated with undisturbed bedrock found at a depth of 1.4m.

2.5.1 Trench 4: Upper level of burials

The uppermost burials were found at a depth of 750–850mm below ground level. They comprised: one intact adult burial (403); which had partially truncated an earlier juvenile burial (404); and various disarticulated charnel material.

- Burial (403) found in the southern half of the trench, comprised: skull, mandible, arms torso, pelvis and upper legs. The bones were fairly well



preserved. Dimensions: left femur *c.*438mm, right femur *c.*447mm, left humerus 318mm.

- Burial (404) consisted of an in-situ juvenile burial, the left side of which had been truncated by a later burial (403). The skeleton was poorly preserved.
- Some charnel material was found close to the skull of burial (403). This comprised a fragment of skull to the north, a possible juvenile humerus adjacent to the north side of the skull; to the south there was a skull, another skull and a fragment of pelvis.
- A skull was found in the extreme north-east corner of the trench at a depth of 770mm. A coffin handle and nails found next to the skull could have been associated. The skull may indicate an in-situ burial extending to the east of the trench.

2.5.2 Trench 4: Lower level of burials

Continued hand excavation of the trench uncovered further burials at a depth of 930–980mm. They comprised the lower half of burial (406), which had been truncated by a subsequent burial (405).

- Burial (405) was the lower half of an adult burial, with hands, legs and feet within the limits of the trench. The bones were well preserved. Dimensions: right femur 450mm, right tibia 355mm. No nails were found during excavation around the feet, suggesting it was probably an un-coffined burial. The partial remains of an earlier burial (406) appear to have been truncated by burial (405).
- Burial (406) consisted of the legs and left hand only of an adult skeleton, which had been partly truncated by a subsequent burial (405). The bones were well preserved. Dimensions: right femur 432mm. A vertical edge in the limestone bedrock along the north edge of the trench appears to be part of the grave cut for burial (406).
- Disarticulated charnel remains at this level consisted of a femur that was found in the south-east corner of the trench.

2.5.3 Trench 4: Base of trench

Below the level of burials (405) and (406) the trench was investigated by hand-digging to a depth of 1.2m, and no further articulated remains were encountered at this depth. The base of the trench was excavated by machine down to limestone bedrock at 1.4m below ground level. Some human bone was recovered at this lower level, including a possible in-situ burial represented by a skull in the south-easternmost corner of the trench (not illustrated).



2.6 Artefacts

2.6.1 Introduction

Pottery sherds, mainly of early medieval date, were collected from three deposits (Table 1), the majority associated with layers (301) and (401). The latter also contained a piece of clay pipe tobacco stem, broadly datable to the post-medieval period. All finds will be returned to the Parochial Church Council.

| Tr. / Feature | Finds Summary (Qty. / Wt.) | |
|---------------|----------------------------|--|
| Tr. 1 (101) | 'Grave earth' | Pottery (1:23g) |
| Tr. 3 (301) | 'Grave earth' | Pottery (8:72g) |
| Tr. 4 (401) | 'Grave earth' | Pottery (8:49g); clay tobacco pipe stem (1:2g) |

Table 1: Artefact Summary by trench and feature

2.6.2 Pottery

Seventeen pottery sherds (144g) collected from 'grave earth' deposits in Trenches 1–3 were identified in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series (Table 2). All are abraded and well-fragmented, with a mean sherd weight of 8g. A sherd of late Roman oxidised ware collected from (301) is the earliest in date. Seven sherds of shell-tempered St Neots-type ware, including the rim from a small jar, are broadly of 10th–12th-century date. Early medieval wares are eight sherds of locally manufactured shelly ware, likely to derive from production centres on the borders of Beds./Bucks./Northants. No diagnostic forms occur. A sand-tempered body sherd in the late medieval reduced ware tradition is the latest sherd recovered.

| Fabric Type | Common name | Date range | Qty. | Wt. (g) | Feature/Qty. |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------|---------|------------------|
| R11 | Oxford oxidised ware | Late Roman | 1 | 20 | (301):1 |
| B01 | St Neots-type ware | 10th-12th century | 3 | 17 | (301):2, (401):1 |
| B01B | St Neots-type ware (fine) | 10th-12th century | 1 | 15 | (301):1 |
| B01C | St Neots-type ware (mixed) | 10th-12th century | 3 | 21 | (401):3 |
| B07 | Shelly ware | 12th-13th century | 8 | 48 | (301):4; (401):4 |
| E01 | Late medieval reduced ware | 14th-15th century | 1 | 23 | (101):1 |

Table 2: Pottery type series and quantification



3. DISCUSSION

The observations provide evidence about the construction and repairs to the south aisle and chancel and also provide a small sample view of the pattern of burials in the churchyard.

3.1 Structural Evidence

3.1.1 Sequence

The foundations of the porch and south aisle are similar in character, with a narrow offset foundation in small to medium-sized rubble and roughly squared limestone blocks. The foundations of the porch and south aisle were constructed separately, with those of the porch abutting the aisle.

The foundations of the chancel are very different in character, with a much wider offset up to 450mm wide in large rubble blocks.

The masonry in the walls of the south aisle and chancel belong to different phases of construction. At the junction there is a break in the coursing of the masonry and there are differences in the height and form of the moulded courses. However, the nature of the relationship is not clear, partly due to extensive restoration works, particularly to the lower part of the chancel wall (see below).

3.1.2 Repairs/alterations

An expanded foundation slab at the south-east corner of the south aisle may have been part of later repair works. One of the slabs of stone in the foundation is a reused medieval grave cover. Carving on the grave slab consists of one terminal from what appears to be a simple cross design. The terminal is a three-lobed trefoil, of the type derived from stiff leaf ornament, suggesting a 13th-century date for the grave slab (Butler 1965, 135–41).

At the west end of the chancel the foundations had been affected by later disturbance, which involved the removal of the foundation slab and reburial of some disarticulated human bone. No structural features were observed to indicate why the foundations had been removed.

The lower part of the chancel walls have been extensively repaired, probably as part of the mid-19th-century restoration works. A heavily weathered drip moulding or basement moulding appears to have been trimmed back level with the wall and the wall below the moulding refaced with new stone.

3.2 Burials

A small amount of disarticulated bone was found during the excavation of the trenches, included a concentration of disarticulated bone adjacent to the south wall of the chancel. In-situ burials were found during the excavation of the three soak-away pits. Investigation showed evidence of inter-cutting burials with some disarticulated chancel material. The two soak-away pits excavated to the south of the church contained at least two sequential layers of burials.



The depth of the burials varied between 740mm for the shallowest and approximately 1m for the deeper burials. The presence of limestone bedrock at around 1m deep is likely to have been an influencing factor; a grave in Trench 3 was cut into the very top of the limestone while some graves in Trench 4 were cut slightly deeper into the bedrock. A grave cut which was partly uncovered in the north-east corner of Trench 3 may have been significantly deeper. It was cut into the bedrock below the base of the trench and its fill contained frequent limestone fragments. This grave is likely to be later in date than the shallower graves that were investigated, probably late-19th-century if related to nearby memorials.

Based mainly on the presence or absence of coffin nails, the burials appeared to be a mixture of coffined and un-coffined.

The majority of the burials produced no dating evidence. A wrought iron coffin handle associated with a burial in the upper part of Trench 4 indicates a broadly post-medieval date. A similar coffin handle and copper alloy studs of the type used to decorate coffins during the 18th and 19th centuries were found in association with the concentration of disarticulated bone in Trench 1.

3.3 Artefacts

Artefacts were recovered from the 'grave earth' deposit during archaeological hand excavation. These comprised 17 sherds of pottery and one fragment of clay pipe stem, with most being found in Trenches 3 and 4. The earliest pottery is a single late Roman sherd; the majority is dated to the Saxo-Norman period (St Neots-type ware, 10th-12th century) and the early medieval period (Shelly ware, 12th-13th century); with one other sherd dating from the late medieval period (Reduced ware 14th-15th century).



4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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5. APPENDIX 1: LIST DESCRIPTION

Grade: I

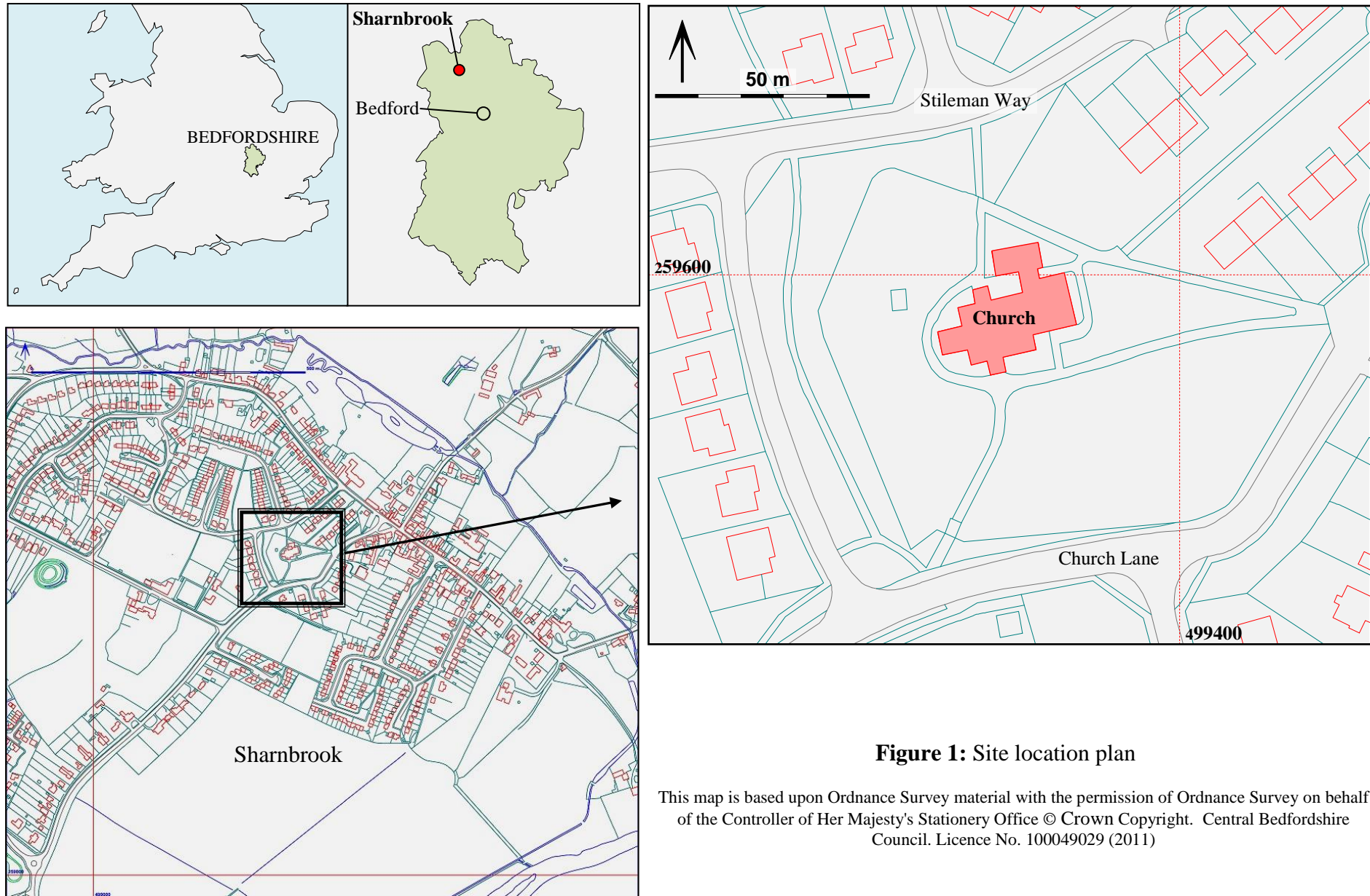
List entry number: 1160824

Date first listed: 13-Jul-1964

Address: Church of St Peter, Church Lane

Description:

Mainly C13 to C15, with restoration of *c.*1855. Limestone rubble with some ashlar. Possible original Norman nave and chancel, with three bay nave rebuilt, aisles added and chancel extended in C13. C14 extensions include large north-east chapel and west tower, with one bay westward extensions of nave. North and south porch and several windows are C15. C17 chancel roof of three bays. C14 3-stepped sedilia and piscina in north chapel. Four bay C15 nave roof with moulded principals, carved and gilded bosses. Tower base with C15 spire and three tiers of lucarnes. C15 octagonal font. C16 screen. C17 Boteler memorial in north chapel, also Magniac memorial by William Burges 1867.



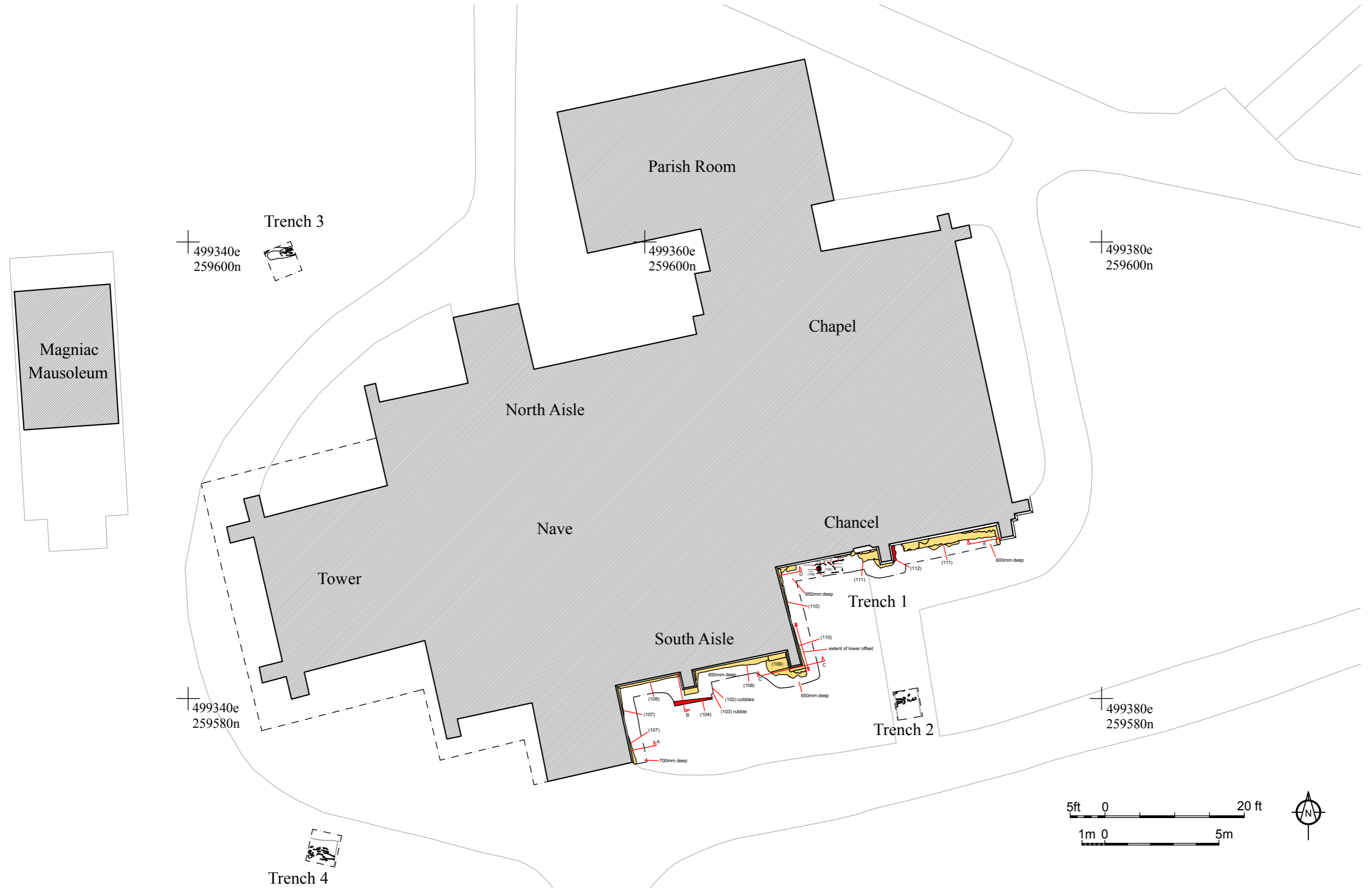


Figure 2: Plan showing location of all works

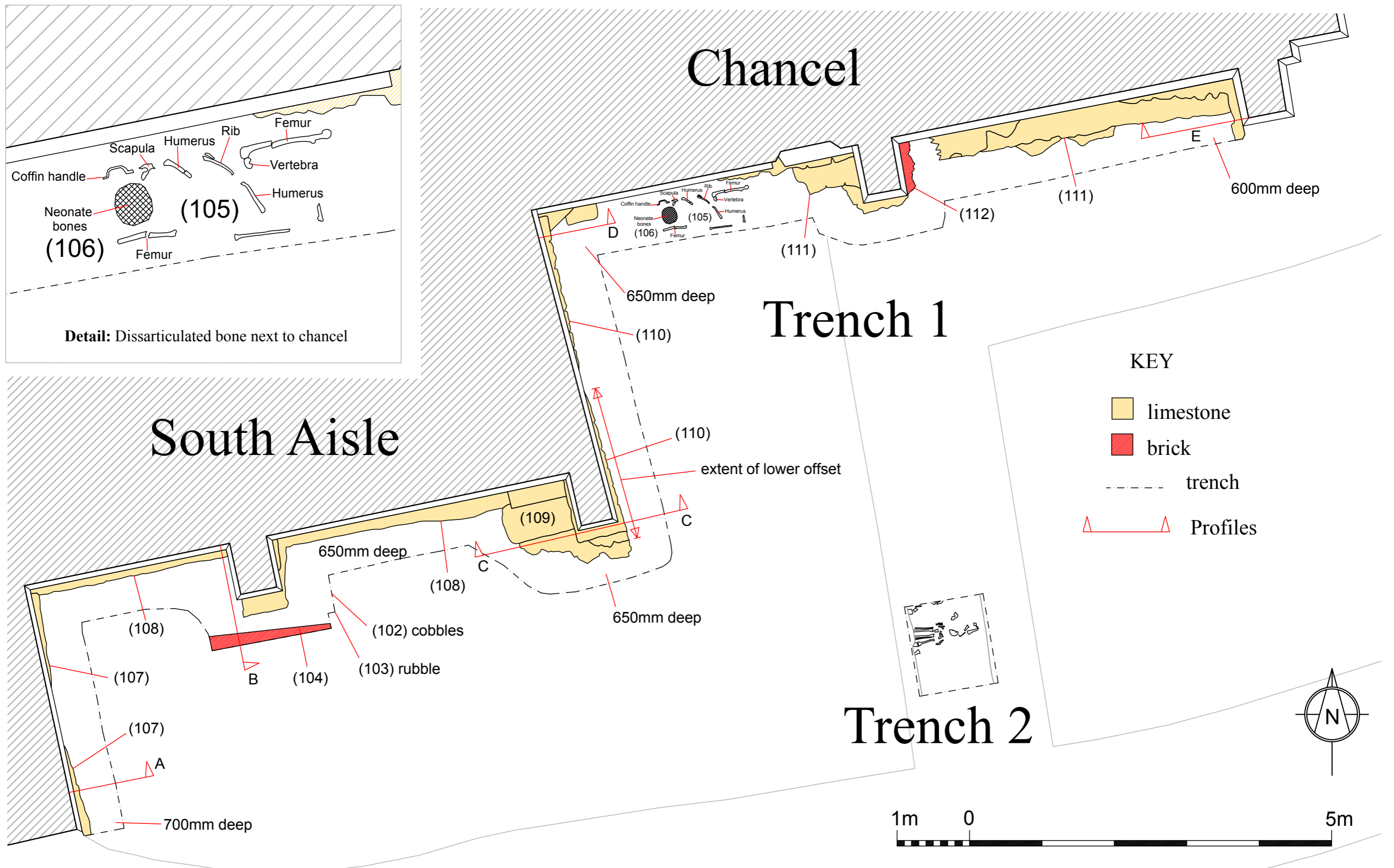
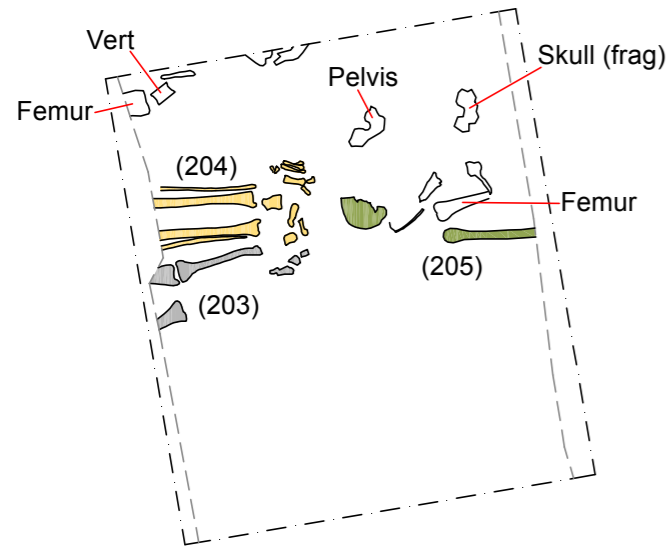


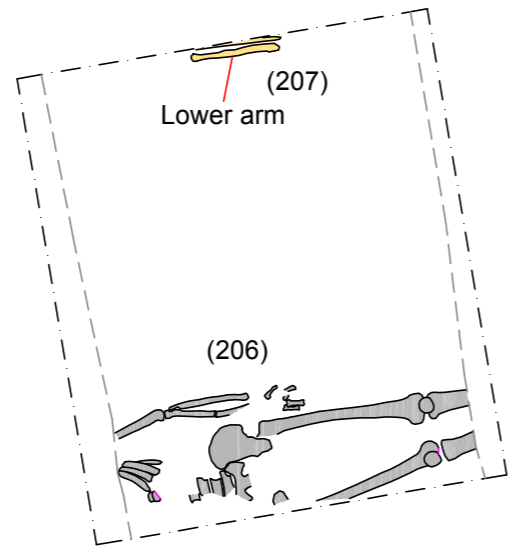
Figure 3: Plan of Trench 1 (French drain to south aisle and chancel)



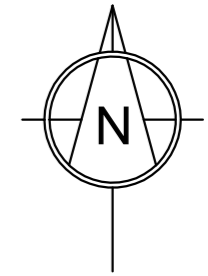
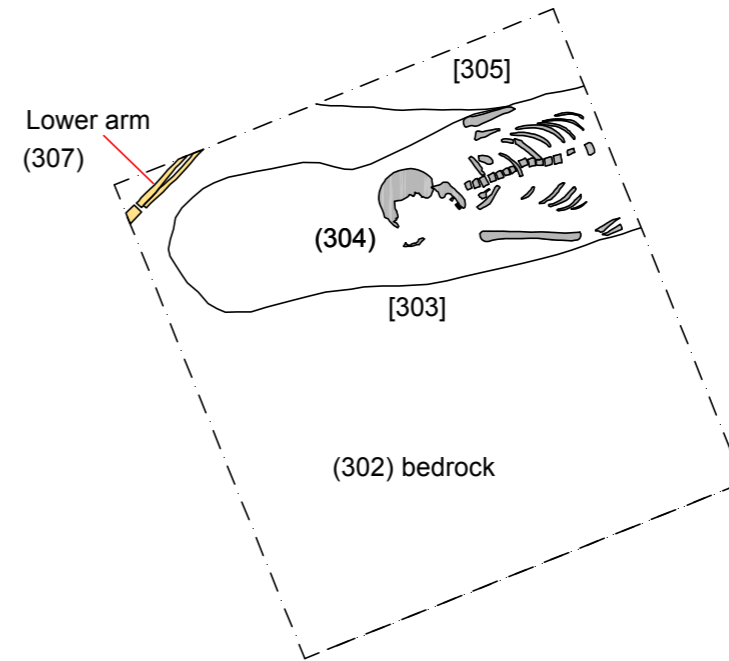
Trench 2: upper level



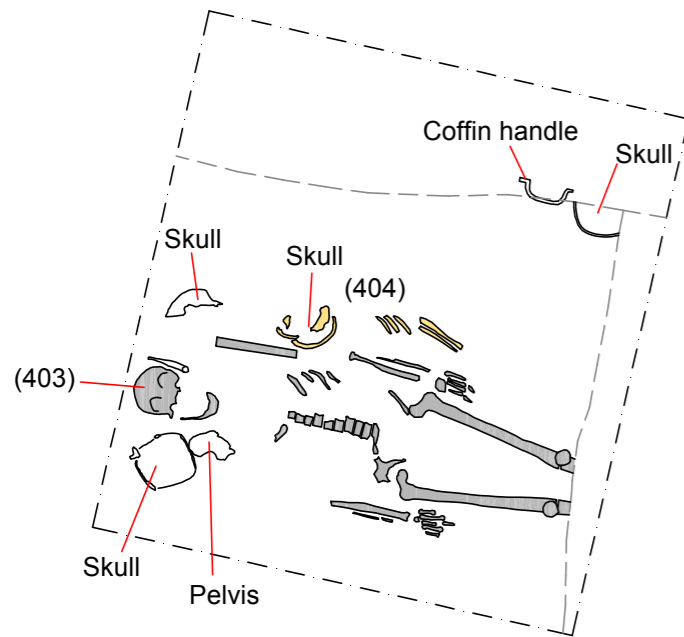
Trench 2: lower level



Trench 3



Trench 4: upper level



Trench 4: lower level

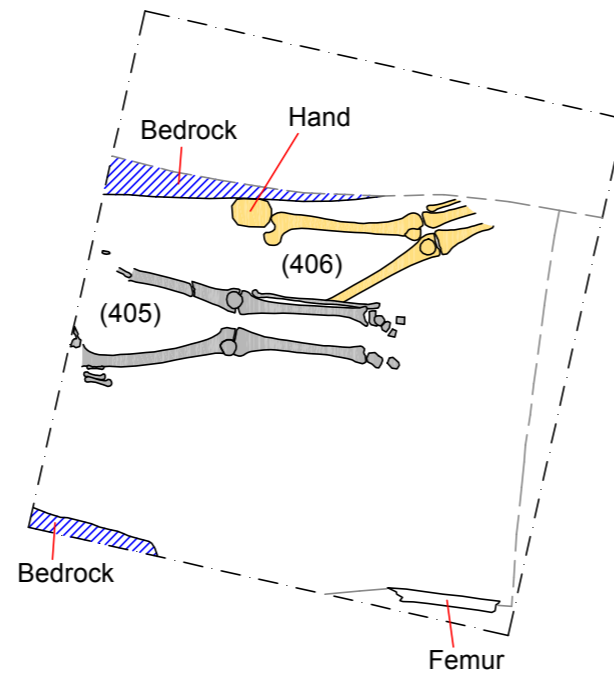


Figure 4: Plans of Trenches 2, 3 & 4

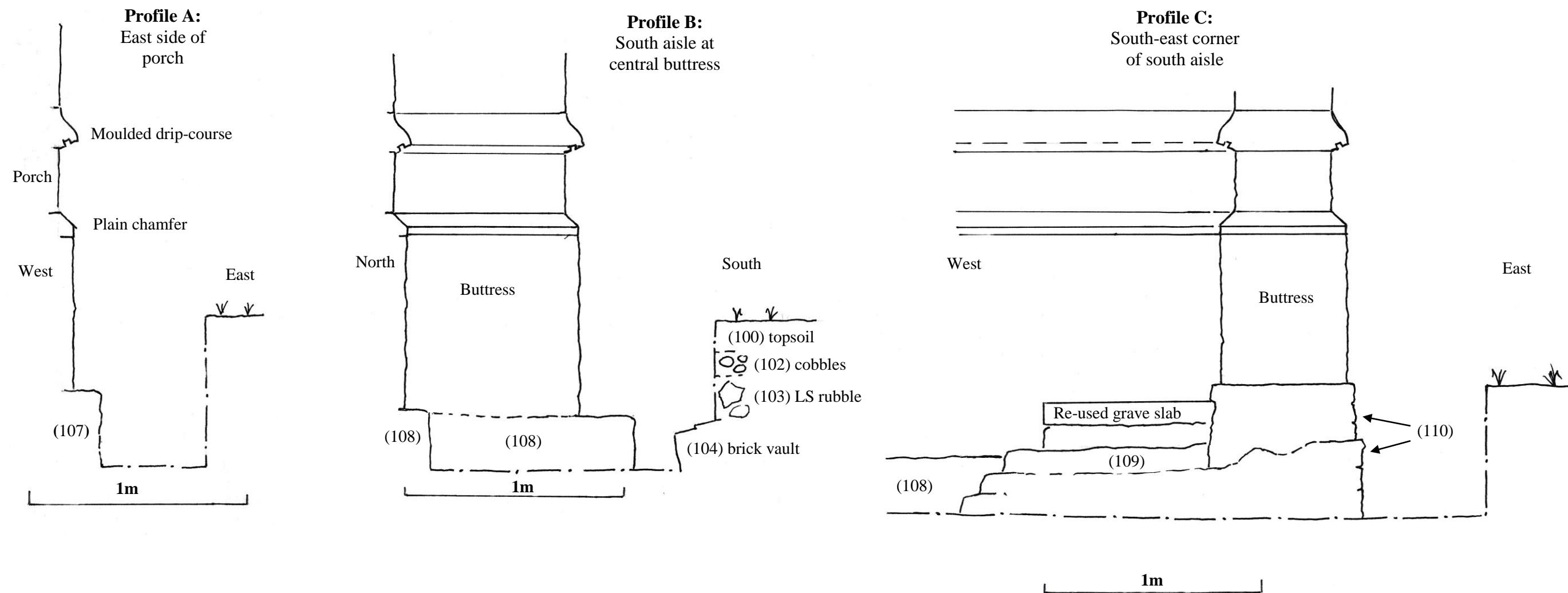


Figure 5: Trench profiles A to C

Drawings based on measured sketch records showing foundations and masonry in lower part of walls (Scale 1:50 at A3)

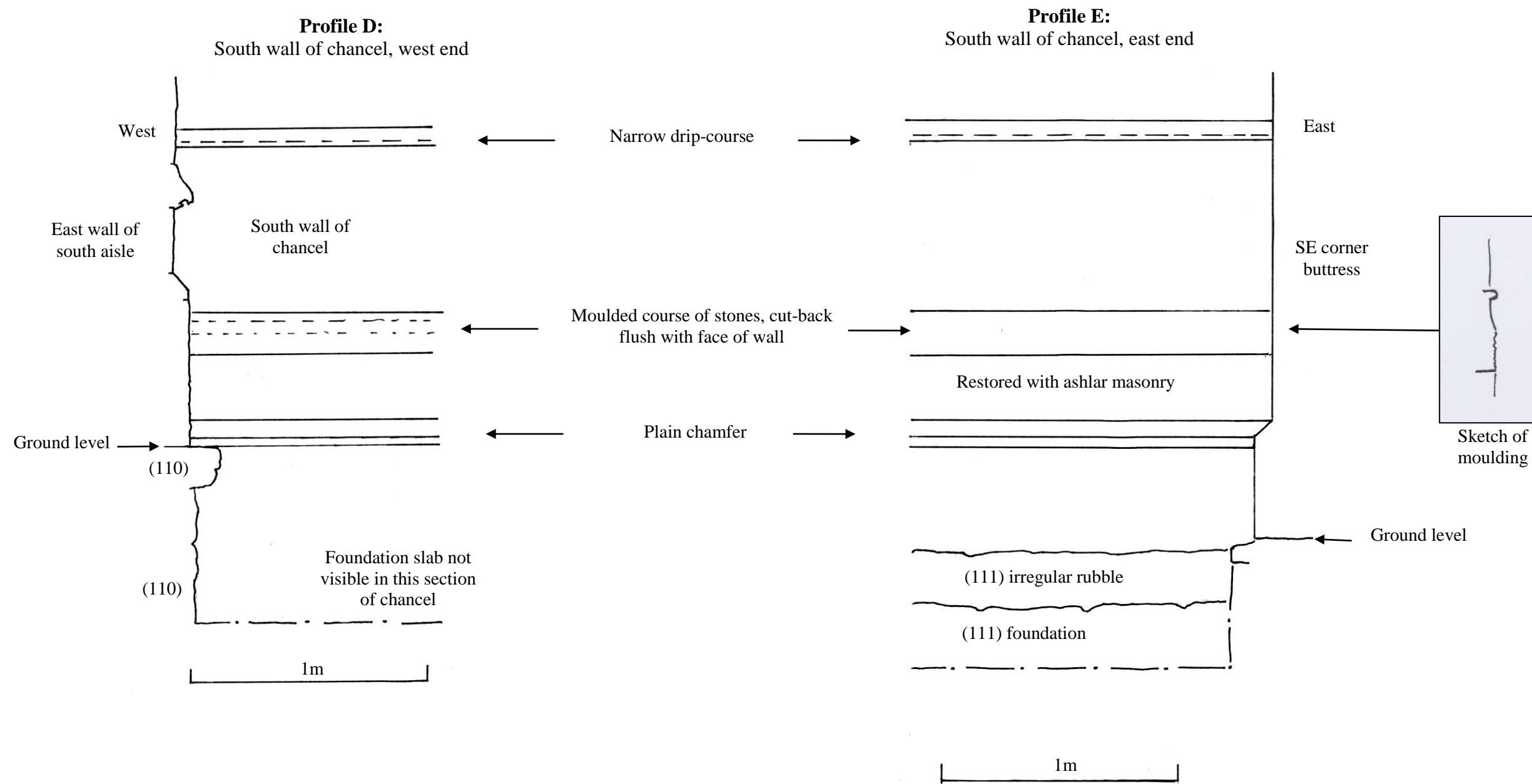


Figure 6: Trench profiles D and E

Drawings based on measured sketch records showing foundations and masonry in lower part of walls (Scale 1:50 at A3)



Image 1: General view of south side of church



Image 2: Trench 1. East wall of south porch, left end
(Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 3: Trench 1. East wall of south porch, right end
(Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 4: South aisle
Photographed following completion of French drain (Scale 2m)



Image 5: Trench 1. South aisle between porch and central buttress
(Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 6: Trench 1. South aisle, central buttress, looking north-east
Brick vault (104) visible in base of trench at right (Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 7: Trench 1. South aisle, central buttress, looking north-west
Brick vault (104) visible in base of trench at left. (Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 8: Trench 1. South aisle, eastern bay
Looking north-east (Scale 2m)



Image 9: Trench 1. South aisle, foundation pad at east end
(Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 10: Trench 1. Reused medieval grave slab
Shows western end of slab



Image 11: East end of south aisle

Looking west, photographed following completion of French drain (Scale 2m)



Image 12: Trench 1. South-east corner of south aisle

Looking north-east (Scale 20m)



Image 13: Trench 1. East end of south aisle, left end
Shows two foundation offsets in rubble masonry (Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 14: Trench 1. East end of south aisle, right end
Shows foundation offset; chancel wall at right (Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 15: South wall of chancel

Photographed following completion of French drain (Scale 2m)



Image 16: Trench 1. Chancel, left end

(Scale 200mm divisions)



Image 17: Trench 1. Chancel, looking north-east



Image 18: Trench 1. Chancel, looking north-west



Image 19: Trench 1. Chancel, looking west

(Scale 2m)



Image 20: Trench 1. Human bone (105)

Shows disarticulated human bone found adjacent to chancel (Scale 1m)



Image 21: Trench 2. Upper layer of burials (203), (204) and (205)

East at top of image; burials (203) and (204) in lower half of image; Skull of (205) and various disarticulated bones (charnel) in upper half (Scale 1m)



Image 22: Trench 2. Lower layer of burials (206) and (207)

East at top of image; burial (206) at right; lower arm of burial (207) at left (Scale 1m)



Image 23: Trench 2. Fully excavated

Looking north, showing grave earth (201) above natural gravel deposit (202) in base of trench

(Scale 2m)



Image 24: Trench 3

Looking north-east, showing location of Trench 3



Image 25: Trench 3. Looking north-east

Shows burial (304), with later grave cut [305] visible as lighter area of soil in far corner of trench (Scale 1m)



Image 26: Trench 3. Burial (304)

North at top; Left arm of burial (304) partially truncated by grave cut [305] at top of image
(Scale 40cm)



Image 27: Trench 4. Looking north-east



Image 28: Trench 4. Upper layer of burials

North-west at top; burial (403) with skull of burial (404) visible at furthest end of scale bar
(Scale 40cm)



Image 29: Trench 4. Upper layer of burials, (403) and (404)

North at top; burial (403) with skull of burial (404) at left end of scale bar
(Scale 40cm)



Image 30: Trench 4. Lower layer of burials, (405) and (406)

North at top; burial (405) overlying truncated lower half of burial (406)
(Scale 1m)

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