

**ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH
EVERSHOLT
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
AND RECORDING**

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St John the Baptist Church PCC
Eversholt
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1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was invited by the Parochial Church Council to carry out archaeological observation and recording of groundworks associated with the installation of new drains at St John the Baptist Church, Eversholt, Bedfordshire. The church is located on the west side of Church End Road, in the south-west corner of the present village, and is centred on grid reference SP 98295 32505 (Figure 1).

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.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St John the Baptist Church is listed Grade II* and comprises a chancel, nave, north and south aisles, a south porch and west tower. Its construction is of coursed ironstone with ashlar dressings.

The church is 12th century in origin, although the chancel is 14th century and the remainder of the building dates mainly to the 15th century.

Major restorations were carried out in 1809-11 and 1863-64 with the latter under Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.

3. DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING WORKS

The groundworks comprised hand-dug excavations for the installation of two soakaways (1 and 2) located to the east and west of the porch (Figure 2). Three connecting pipe trenches were also dug to carry rainwater collected by the roof guttering to the soakaways. These new drains serve to augment the existing French drain which surrounds the walls of the church.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The groundworks that required archaeological monitoring and recording took place on 20th and 21st November 2008.

Methods employed during the project complied with the Institute of Field 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).

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

A copy of this report and the project archive, which comprises all written and photographic records, will be stored at Albion Archaeology premises until an appropriate



site for deposition is agreed. Copies of the report will also be forwarded to the Historic Environment Record at County Hall, Bedford, and the OASIS online database.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Soakaway 1

The excavations for soakaway 1 (Figure 2) measured 1.1m square and 1.63m deep. The associated pipe trench connecting the soakaway to the existing south aisle drains was 0.30m wide, 5.3m long and 0.98m deep.

The topsoil (100) comprised dark grey brown sandy silt and was 0.20m thick. The subsoil (101) comprised mid orange brown silty clay and was 0.80m thick. The subsoil contained fragments of disarticulated human bone. It is likely that the subsoil was truncated by inhumations [103] and [107] (see below), although the backfill of these graves was too similar to the subsoil to detect the interface between them. Natural geological deposits (102) comprising mid blue grey clay were encountered at a depth of around 1m below ground level.

The west end of a coffined burial [103] (Figure 3) was recorded at a depth of 1.23m within the soakaway excavation. The coffin had decorated copper alloy plates on its sides and end. An iron handle was attached to the plate on the end. The coffin was left *in situ* and excavation continued down a further 0.4m around it. During the course of excavations, the top of the skull was revealed within the coffin.

A relatively shallow burial [107] (Figure 4) was uncovered 0.25m below ground level within the pipe trench. Only the skull and upper torso were revealed and no coffin was apparent. The premolar and first molar had erupted within the mandible indicating that the individual was a juvenile.

5.2 Soakaway 2

The excavation for soakaway 2 (Figure 2) measured 1.1m square and 1.42m deep. Two pipe trenches connecting the soakaway to the existing south aisle and chancel drains were 0.30m wide, 0.50m to 0.60m deep and a total of 14.6m long.

Topsoil (200) comprised dark grey brown sandy silt and was 0.20m thick. The subsoil (201) comprised mid grey brown sandy silt. It was at least 0.44m thick and contained fragments of disarticulated human bone. Subsoil was only observed within the pipe trenches because, within the soakaway, it had been completely truncated by graves. Natural geological deposits (202) comprising light orange grey clay sand were encountered at a depth of around 0.84m below ground level.

Five probable graves [203, 206, 215, 222 and 225] were identified within the soakaway at depths varying from 0.73m to 1.4m below ground level. Small fragments of coffin and copper alloy pins were identified only within the shallowest burial [203] (Figure 5). Partial articulated skeletons were recorded in all of the inhumations except the deepest one [215]. A later feature [219] was recorded in section cutting this inhumation. It was 0.27m wide and 1.04m deep with near vertical sides which angled in towards a flat base. The deposit within it was a soft, poorly compacted, re-deposited natural. It is unclear what the purpose of this cut was for but it is unlikely that it was dug for an inhumation because it was too narrow to allow even a small coffin to be lowered to its base.



Two relatively shallow inhumations [209 and 212] (Figure 6) were revealed at a depth of around 0.20m below ground level within the pipe trench leading to the south aisle. In both burials only the articulated lower leg bones were revealed and no coffin was apparent.

6. CONCLUSION

The archaeological observation of the works to improve drainage on the south side of St John the Baptist Church identified nine probable graves, all aligned E-W.

The greatest concentration of graves was found in the excavation for soakaway (2) to the south-east of the church. Five burials were encountered in this small pit with the shallowest being at around 0.73m below ground level. This density of burials is not reflected within the churchyard itself as no gravestones or markers are present in this area.

Gravestones are present in the vicinity of soakaway (1) to the south-west of the church, although only one burial was found in this excavation at a depth of 1.23m below ground level.

The three shallowest burials were all found at a depth of around 0.20-0.25m below ground level. These burials were the closest to the church and were uncovered in the pipe trenches.

The majority of the inhumations are undated although the two found associated with coffin remains are clearly relatively modern in date. It is also probable that the three shallow burials found close to the church are the oldest and may represent medieval remains.



7. APPENDIX: CONTEXT SUMMARY



Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: m. Width: m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.25 m. Max: 1.23 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP98292/32488

Reason: Excavations for soakaway 1 and connecting pipes

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Firm dark grey brown sandy silt 0.20m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Subsoil	Firm mid orange brown silty clay 0.80m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Natural	Hard mid blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Grave	Rectangular E-W profile: vertical dimensions: max breadth 0.5m, min depth 0.83m, min length 0.8m	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Coffin		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
105	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
106	Backfill	Firm mid orange brown silty clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
107	Grave	Rectangular E-W profile: vertical dimensions: min breadth 0.25m, min depth 0.25m, min length 0.3m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
108	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
109	Backfill	Firm mid orange brown silty clay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: m. Width: m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.2 m. Max: 0.73 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP98309/32498

Reason: Excavations for soakaway and connecting pipes

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Firm dark grey brown sandy silt 0.22m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
201	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt 0.44m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
202	Natural	Firm light orange grey clay sand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
203	Grave	Rectangular E-W profile: vertical base: flat dimensions: max breadth 0.42m, max depth 0.57m, min length 0.67m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
204	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
205	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
206	Grave	Rectangular E-W dimensions: min breadth 0.95m, max depth 0.34m, min length 1.13m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
207	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
208	Backfill	Firm mid orange grey clay sand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
209	Grave	Rectangular E-W dimensions: min breadth 0.35m, min depth 0.22m, min length 0.6m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
210	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
211	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
212	Grave	Rectangular E-W dimensions: max breadth 0.25m, min depth 0.22m, min length 0.6m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
213	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
214	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
215	Grave	Rectangular E-W profile: vertical base: flat dimensions: min breadth 0.4m, max depth 1.25m, min length 1.15m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
216	Backfill	Firm light orange grey clay sand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
217	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
218	Backfill	Firm light orange grey clay sand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
219	Pit	profile: near vertical base: flat dimensions: max breadth 0.27m, max depth 1.04m, min length 0.26m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
220	Backfill	Loose light orange grey clay sand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
221	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
222	Grave	Rectangular E-W profile: vertical base: flat dimensions: min breadth 0.38m, max depth 0.31m, min length 0.58m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
223	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
224	Backfill	Firm light orange grey clay sand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
225	Grave	Rectangular E-W base: flat dimensions: min breadth 0.95m, max diameter 0.62m, min length 1.13m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
226	Backfill	Firm dark grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
227	Human skeleton		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
228	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

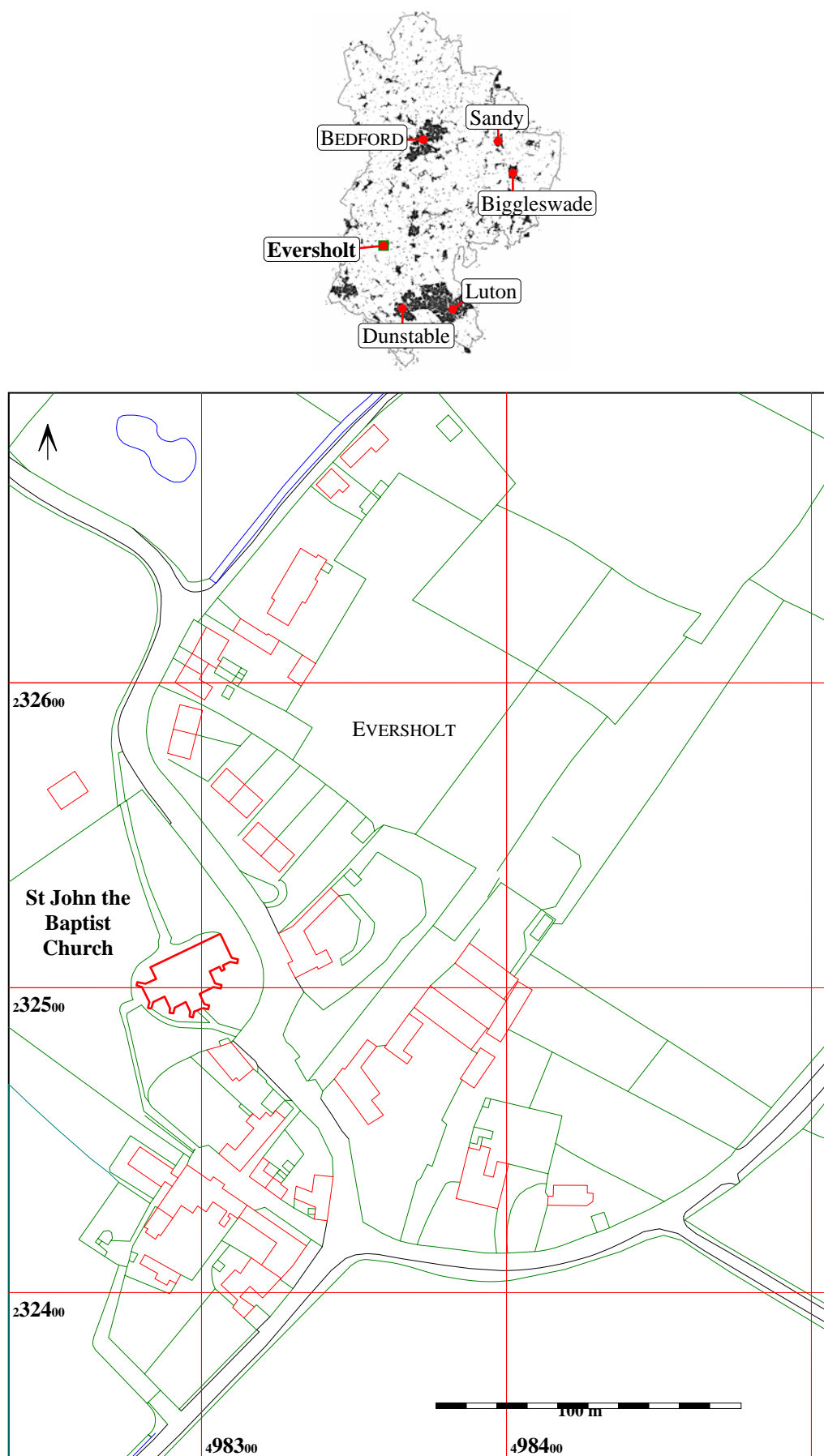


Figure 1: Site location plan

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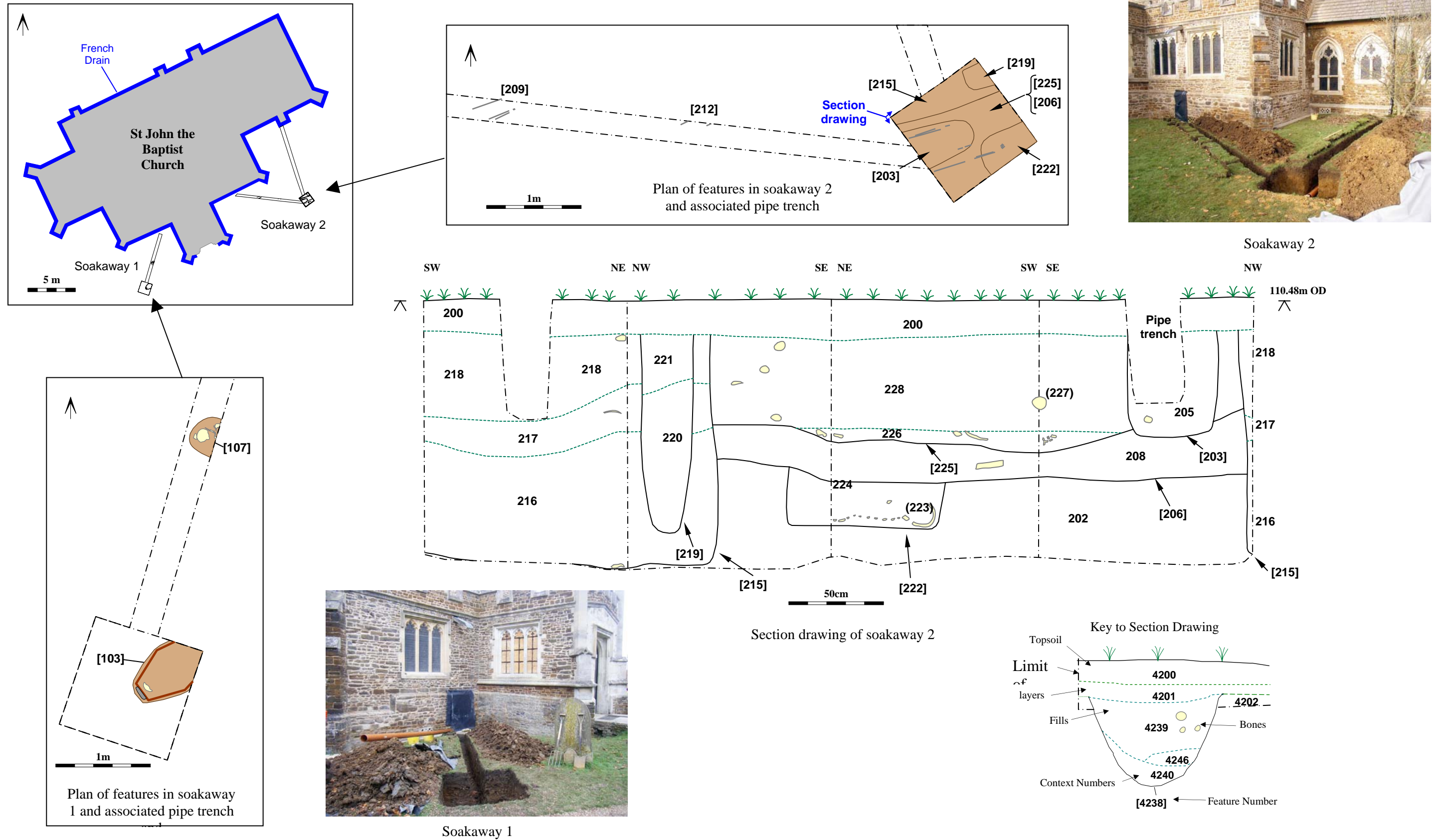


Figure 2: Excavation plans and sections

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Figure 3: Soakaway 1, burial [103], scale 0.4m



Figure 4: Burial [107], scale 0.4m



Figure 5: Soakaway 2, burial [203], scale 1m



Figure 6: Burial [209], scale 0.4m