

**CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, RENHOLD,
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**A PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL
OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION, RECORDING
ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION**

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Preface

All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

This report has been prepared by Ian Turner (Archaeological Supervisor) and edited by Drew Shotliff. Illustrations were prepared by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician). The fieldwork was also undertaken by Ian Turner. The project was managed by Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

Albion would like to thank Victor Farrar of The Victor Farrar Partnership (Architects), Hibbitt & Sons Masonry (Church Restoration Contractors) Evelyn Baker (Diocesan Archaeological Advisor) and the Renhold Parochial Church Council for their assistance and co-operation.

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Non-technical summary

Albion Archaeology undertook a watching brief in June 2006 at the Church of All Saints in the village of Renhold, Bedfordshire (NGR: TL 0888 5285) during work to improve drainage and alleviate damp inside the building. The building work entailed the excavation of trenches for the installation of French drains. These were up to 680mm deep and extended along the south side and for two metres around the south-east corner of the building.

Observations along the foundations and walls on the south side of the church suggest that the chancel and nave are probably contemporary and that sections of the chancel and nave walls possibly pre-date the 15th-century phase of re-building.

Observations along the south side of the tower confirmed that the construction was of one build, carried out in the 15th century.

Other 15th-century changes are likely to have included:

- *the addition of larger windows and buttresses to the south wall of the nave*
- *an increase in the height of the nave wall*
- *the addition of larger windows to the chancel*
- *the re-dressing of the lower sections of the chancel and nave walls, with limestone blocks and rounded pebbles beneath a string course chamfered plinth.*

Observations along the south side of the chancel also suggest that the position of the chancel south door may have changed and that an earlier double buttress may have been located at the south-east corner of the chancel.

The buttresses to the south side of the church were largely restored during the 19th-century restoration. At that time, the nave south wall was probably heightened again when the roof pitch was increased.

The project archive is deposited at Bedford Museum under accession number BEDFM 2006.305.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Project background*

In 2006, Renhold Parochial Church Council commissioned a scheme of works to improve drainage along the south side of the Church of All Saints (NGR TL0888, 5285) (Figure 1). The Archaeological Advisor for the St Albans Diocese, David Baker, advised that a programme of archaeological recording should be carried out in conjunction with the repairs and issued a brief specifying how it should be done. Albion Archaeology was commissioned by The Victor Farrar Partnership to undertake the recording between 12th and 16th June 2006.

1.2 *Historical and archaeological background*

The church consists of a chancel, nave, north aisle, west tower and south porch. The building probably dates back originally to the Norman period. It contains a Norman-style font and the list of recorded vicars goes back to 1229. In its earliest form the building would probably have comprised simply a nave and chancel. It is suggested that the present building dates mainly from the 14th century, with the tower added in the 15th century when the south wall of the nave was rebuilt. A mausoleum, in existence by 1708, was constructed in the angle between the north aisle and the chancel. In the early 18th century, sometime after 1724, the present vestry was constructed as the village schoolroom. The church was the subject of extensive restoration work in 1862-63. During this work some of the stonework was restored, the roof was replaced and heightened, internally the chancel arch was replaced, plaster was removed from the walls and the seating was replaced. Historical information and references to original documentary sources can be found in *Bedfordshire Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (ed. Pickford 1978) and the *Victoria County History of Bedfordshire* (Page 1912).

1.3 *Methodology*

The works carried out by the contractors (Hibbitt & Sons Masonry) consisted of the insertion of French drains along the south side and south-east corner of the church. This entailed the excavation of trenches approximately 700mm wide and up to 680mm deep along the base of the walls. Test excavation showed the wall to be in need of consolidation. To achieve this, the wall was refaced below ground.

Prior to consolidation, the walls were cleaned, recorded, drawn and photographed as appropriate. During recording, emphasis was placed on elucidating the relationship between the foundations and the above-ground structure and examining how the different parts of the building related to one another.

1.4 *Aims and scope of report*

This report presents the findings from the archaeological investigations. Detailed plans, context records, photos, *etc.* are contained in the project



archive, which has been deposited at Bedford Museum under archive
accession number BEDFM 2006.305



2. RESULTS

2.1 Introduction

In the following section details of the observations are presented in the form of descriptions of the various constructional elements of the building, arranged as far as possible in chronological order.

2.2 The chancel

The construction sequence at the east end of the church began with the chancel and was later developed by the addition of the Howbury Mausoleum and the vestry structures to the north side.

At foundation level, the chancel wall was constructed of rounded, mainly reddish brown pebbles that formed two distinct horizontal bands (Figure 2, Plate 1). The lower band (100) consisted of pebbles, up to c.120mm in size, with occasional rough-faced flints, up to 70mm in size. The stones were very roughly coursed in a loose, broken down, sandy mortar, which formed c. 40% of this part of the foundation. The upper band (101) consisted of larger pebbles, up to 170mm long, roughly coursed in a firmer, sandy mortar which was in better condition.

Above the foundations, a string course of limestone blocks (102) jugged out by 20mm below the chancel wall, forming a plinth that capped the foundations and formed a level surface for the wall construction.

Above the plinth, the chancel wall appeared to have been cut back and refaced with red brown pebbles, up to 90mm in size (103) and limestone blocks squared and built to courses (104) / (105), rising by 0.86m to a chamfered string course (106). This change was probably part of the work carried out in the 15th century.

Above the string course (106), the wall was constructed of rounded red brown pebbles up to 140mm in size (108) with some later repairs in limestone blocks. The pebble facing (108) is probably the original chancel wall and thus pre-dates the 15th-century works. The chancel wall courses exhibited some re-pointing since the 19th-century restoration with mid buff yellow to grey, hard sandy mortars.

Two fragments of roof tile were observed in the spoil from the trench excavated to the south of the chancel. They comprised a near complete, sand tempered, flat roof tile, measuring 245mm x 150mm x 15mm, and a broken limestone roof tile. Both were probably of late medieval (c.14th century) date.

2.2.1 Buttresses to the south and east of the chancel

The size and form of the lower foundations of Buttresses 6 and 7, at the south-east corner of the chancel, suggest that the current double buttresses are a replacement for an earlier double buttress (Figure 2, Plate 2).



The foundations of Buttress 6 comprised roughly coursed, rounded pebbles in a loose sandy mortar (132) beneath limestone blocks, squared, built to courses, and bonded with a sandy mortar (110).

The foundations of Buttress 7 comprised two large limestone blocks bonded with loose sandy mortar (114) below two smaller levelling stones, bonded with a sandy mortar (115), placed to form a flat surface for the final layer of buttress padstones (116).

Above the foundations, Buttress 6 and 7 appear very similar in construction. They were of limestone block masonry construction, squared, built to courses with quoins stressed and appear to have been largely restored, probably in the 19th century (Pickford 1978).

A single large limestone block (125), probably associated with the earlier buttress, projected south of the course of rounded pebbles (132) at the base of Buttress 6. It was located above a single course of pebbles in a loose sandy mortar (126). The block was removed in order to complete the programme of drainage works and was replaced next to the buttress during re-instatement.

The foundations for Buttress 5 were similar to those of Buttress 6 and also suggest an earlier buttress at this location was largely replaced during the 19th-century restoration.

2.2.2 Possible earlier south door foundation

A line of limestone blocks and rounded pebbles (127) projected out from the chancel south wall foundations to the west of Buttress 5 (Figure 2, Plate 3). The projecting stonework was 1.26m long appeared to have 45 degree chamfered edges as it cut back towards the chancel wall foundations. It was bonded with a loose sandy mortar. It may represent the foundation for an earlier south door to the chancel.

2.2.3 Relationship between nave and chancel

Where the chancel meets the nave, the nave corner foundations were observed beneath Buttress 4 (Plates 4 and 10). The course of oval pebbles and loose, degraded sandy mortar appeared to be identical to the foundations of the chancel, suggesting that the two structures are contemporary. The pebble walls of the nave and chancel are also generally similar in appearance.

2.3 The Nave

It has been suggested that the south wall of the nave was rebuilt in the 15th century (Pickford 1978). However, it is possible that the pebble south wall of the nave is still partly the original construction, although heightened and modified in the 15th century with larger windows and buttresses.



At foundation level, the nave wall was constructed of rounded, mainly reddish brown pebbles and limestone fragments between *c.* 80mm and 170mm in size, bonded with a friable sandy mortar (131) (Figure 2) (Plate 5).

Above the foundations a string course of roughly hewn, squared, limestone blocks, between 90mm and 280mm in length, bonded with a friable sandy mortar (118), projected out some 80mm beneath the nave wall. The blocks formed a plinth that capped the foundations and provided a level building platform for the nave wall.

Above the plinth, the lower section of nave wall appeared to have been cut back and dressed with three string courses of limestone blocks (119) and large sandstone oval pebbles (129), roughly coursed, rising by 480mm and capped with a sandstone chamfered plinth (106). Above the chamfered plinth the wall comprised large, roughly coursed, oval pebbles (128) continuing up to the full height of the nave (Plate 10). The nave wall exhibited episodes of re-pointing, probably post-dating the 19th-century restoration, with mid buff yellow to grey, hard, sandy mortars.

Sections of the upper wall (128) are possibly the original construction with larger windows and buttresses being added and the height being increased in the 15th century. The wall was probably heightened again in the 19th century when the roof pitch was increased.

2.3.1 Buttresses added to the nave south wall

The foundations of both Buttress 3 and 4 comprised large limestone padstones (136) and (135) (Plates 4 and 6). The buttresses were probably later additions to the south nave wall rather than being part of its original construction. They probably date to the 15th century when the larger windows were inserted.

Above ground, the buttresses were constructed of limestone blocks, squared, built to courses with quoins stressed. They appeared outwardly to have been largely rebuilt in the 19th century.

2.3.2 Porch

A foundation plinth of un-mortared limestone blocks (120) was observed beneath the west wall of the south porch (Figure 2, Plate 7). Above the plinth, the wall comprised a lower course of roughly hewn, squared limestone blocks, above which the porch was of red brown pebble construction, similar to the nave wall (128).

Two sherds of late medieval (*c.* 14th century) pottery were observed in the topsoil in the trench west of the porch. They comprised single, unabraded sherds (total weight 18g) — one of sand tempered reduced ware (Type E01¹) and one of glazed Brill / Boarstall ware (Type C09), the latter a fine ware import from Buckinghamshire.

¹ Fabric types defined in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, held by Albion Archaeology.



2.4 15th-century additions

The church underwent an extensive programme of construction work during the 15th century. A tower was added to the west end of the nave, the adjoining west end of the north aisle was rebuilt and windows of this date indicate that the south wall of the nave was largely re-built.

2.4.1 The Tower

The tower south wall foundations comprised limestone masonry, squared and built to courses, above a base of sub-oval roughly hewn, limestone padstones (123) which were observed at a depth of 0.55m below the current ground surface (Figure 2, Plate 8).

The tower was built in coursed limestone masonry throughout. The ground level stage has a large window in its west face, in the perpendicular style of the 15th century and a string course consisting of a moulded chamfer. The external angles of the tower on the north-west and south-west are supported by substantial diagonal buttresses.

It is likely that the tower was butted up to and ‘wrapped around’ the west end of the earlier nave. This can be observed at the junction between the two on the south side where, below the level of the windows, the wall of the tower and its lowest string course are butted up to the pebble and mortar wall of the nave.

2.4.2 Buttresses to south wall of the tower

Buttresses 1 and 2 on the south wall of the tower were set on substantial limestone padstones (122) and (121) (Plates 8 and 9). A gap in the masonry between Buttress 2 and the tower at foundation level indicates separate construction at foundation level. However, above foundation level, the buttress is integral with the stonework of the tower.

2.5 19th-century restoration of the church

The extensive programme of restoration work carried out in 1862 and 1863 affected much of the building, both internally and externally.

Within the area affected by the current drainage works, the most obvious evidence of this was the buttresses. Their perfectly finished, machine- or saw-cut stones suggest that they were part of the 19th-century restoration work. They appear to have been almost completely rebuilt, leaving only slight traces of earlier buttress foundations at the south-east corner of the chancel (Plates 2 and 10)



3. CONCLUSIONS

The digging of trenches for the installation of drainage provided an opportunity to examine and record the foundations of the majority of the south side of the church. The results from this, when considered in relation to the rest of the building, enable some conclusions to be drawn regarding the constructional sequence.

Previous descriptions of the church will have largely used the stylistic dating of windows to compare the dates of different parts of the building. This does have inherent problems due to the fact that windows can be inserted into an existing wall, often leaving no evidence that this has happened. Observation of the foundation of the building can provide further information on the relation of the various parts of the building and the probable constructional sequence.

The south wall of the nave has previously been dated to the 15th century on account of its decorated style windows (Pickford 1998). Examination of the foundations of the nave and chancel suggest that they are contemporary and that sections of the pebble walls possibly pre-date the changes of the 15th century.

Observations along the south side of the chancel suggest that the position of the chancel south door may have changed and that an earlier double buttress may have been located at the south-east corner of the structure.

Observations along the south side of the tower confirm that the construction was of one build, carried out in the 15th century. It has been suggested that the 15th-century tower 'wraps around' the end of the nave (Albion 2002). The observations along the southern side of the tower and nave support this view.

Other 15th-century changes are likely to have included:

- the addition of larger windows and buttresses to the south wall of the nave
- an increase in the height of the nave wall
- the addition of larger windows to the chancel
- the re-dressing of the lower sections of the chancel and nave walls, with limestone blocks and rounded pebbles beneath a string course chamfered plinth.

The buttresses to the south side of the church were largely restored during the 19th century. At the same time, the south nave wall was probably further heightened when the roof pitch was increased.



4. REFERENCES

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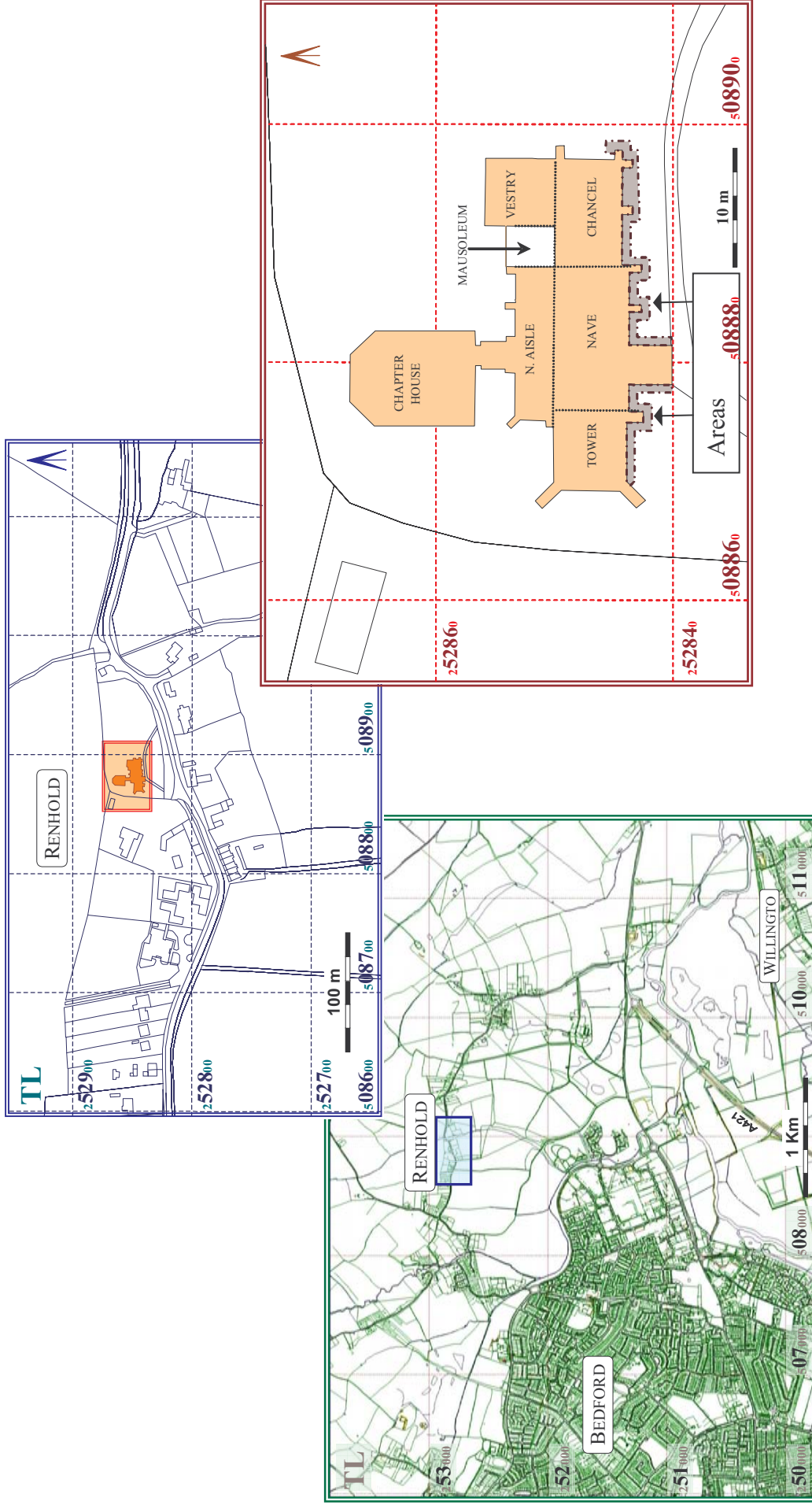


Figure 1: Location of site

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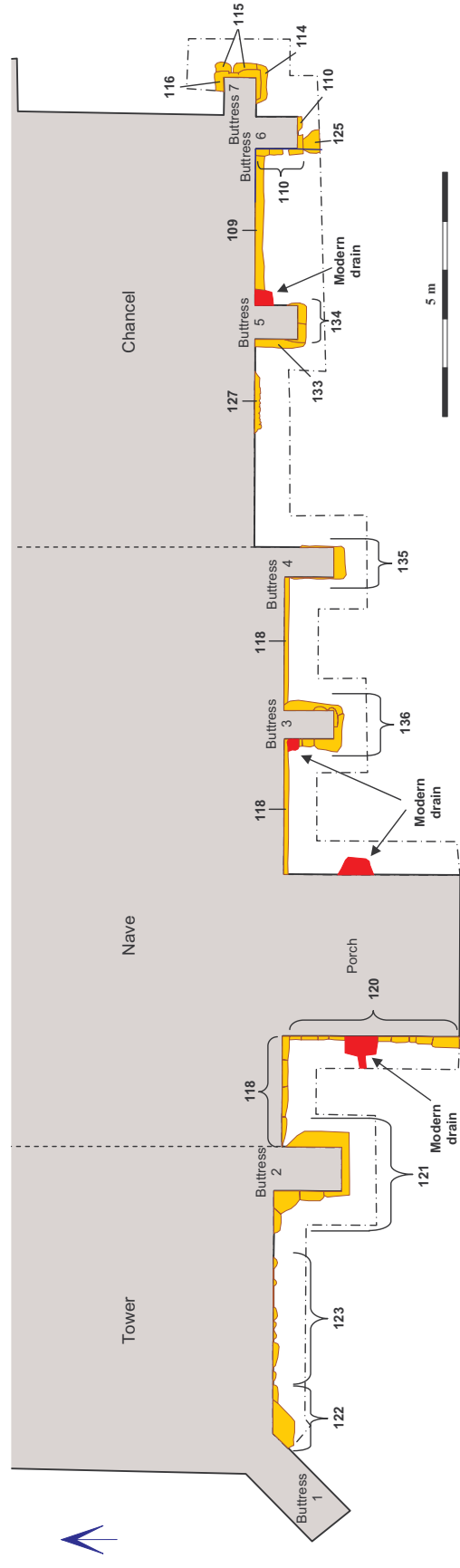


Figure 2: Plan of trench on south side of the church

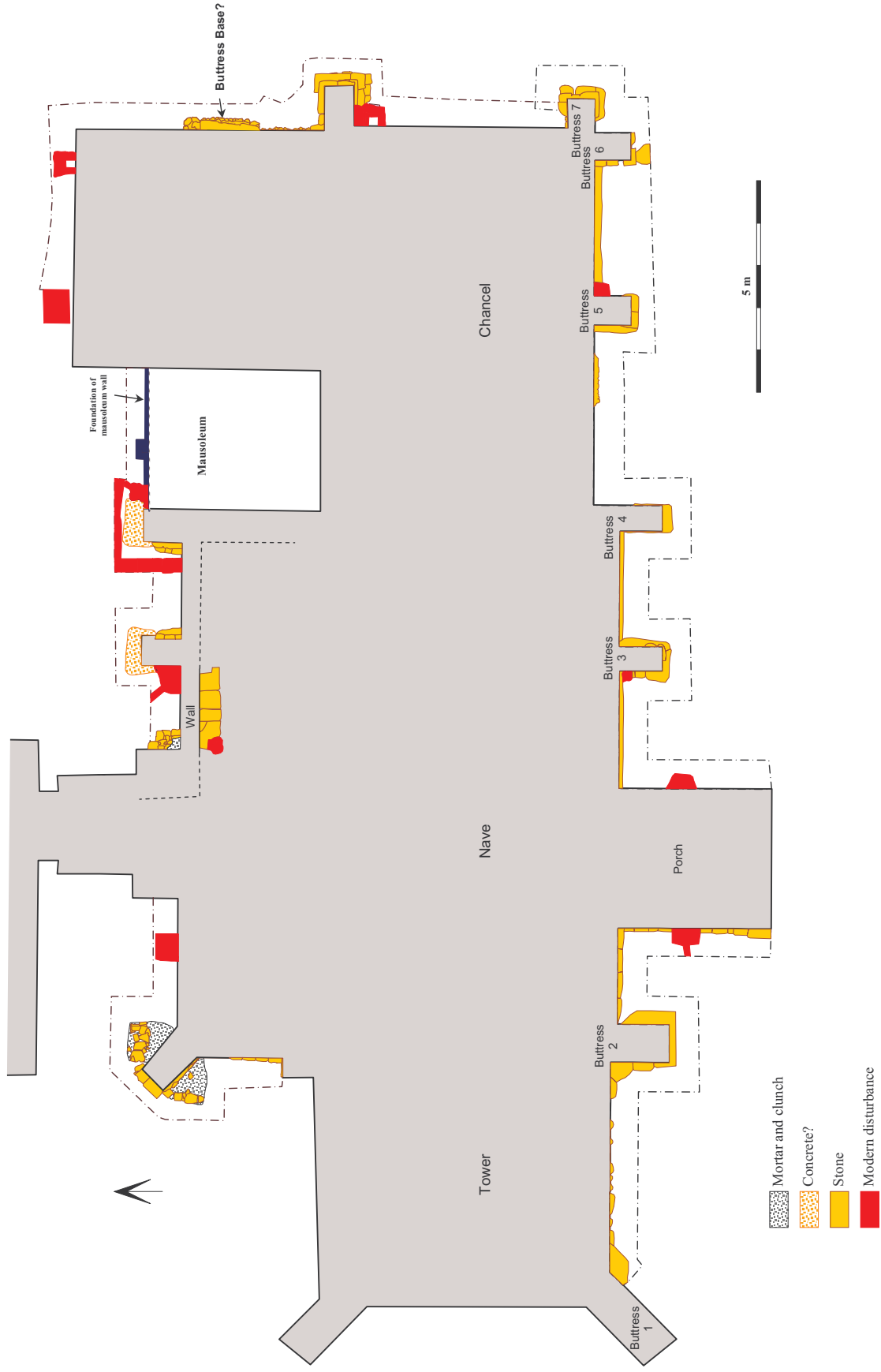


Figure 3: Previous and current work

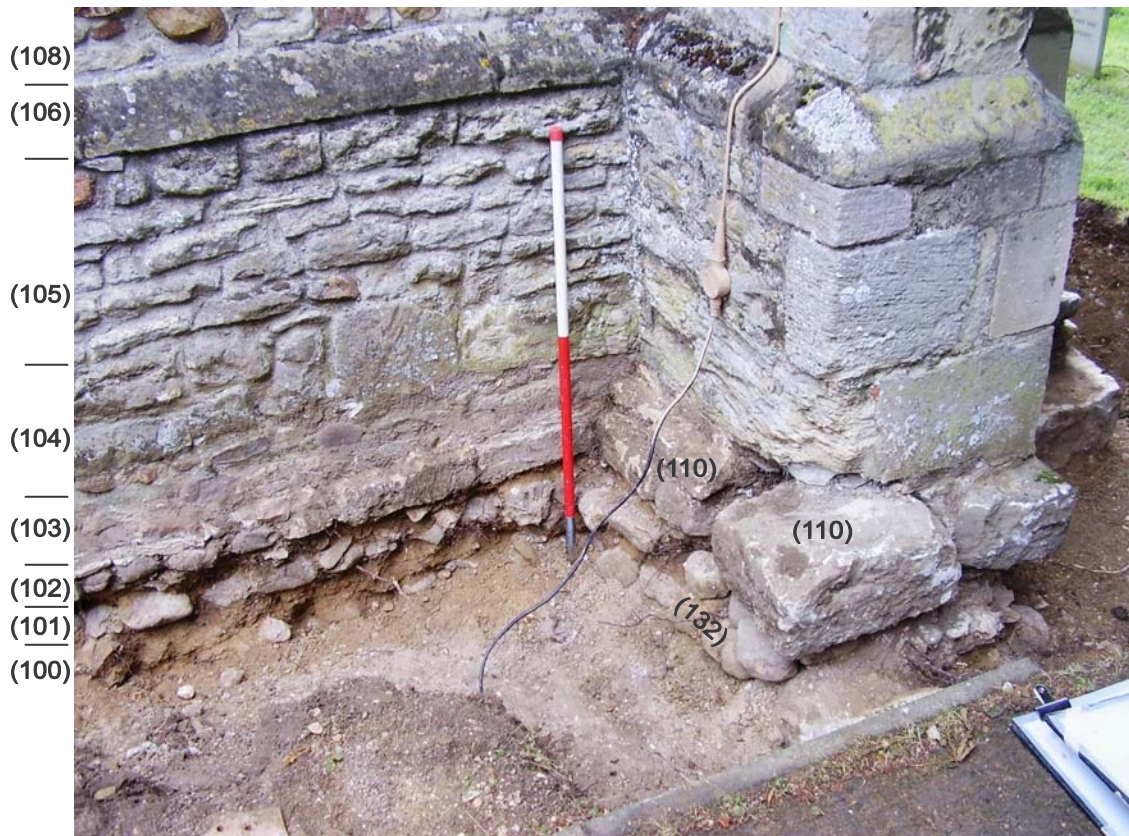


Plate 1: Chancel foundation courses (100), (101), foundation plinth (102) and wall (103), (104), (105), (106), (108), and Buttress 6. Scale 1m



Plate 2: Chancel south-east corner double buttress. Scale 1m



Plate 3: Possible earlier chancel south door foundation (127). Scale 1m

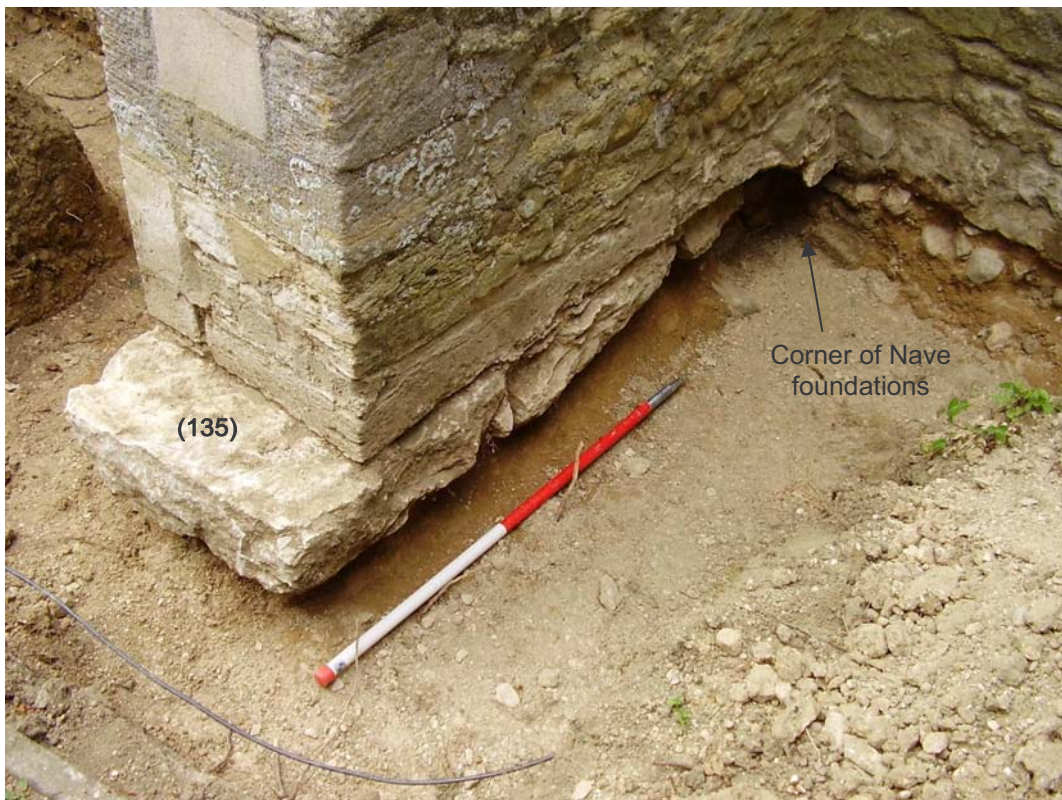


Plate 4: Nave Buttress 4 adjoining chancel. Scale 1m



Plate 5: Nave foundation course (131), and plinth (118). Scale 1m



Plate 6: Buttress 3 padstones (136). Scale 1m

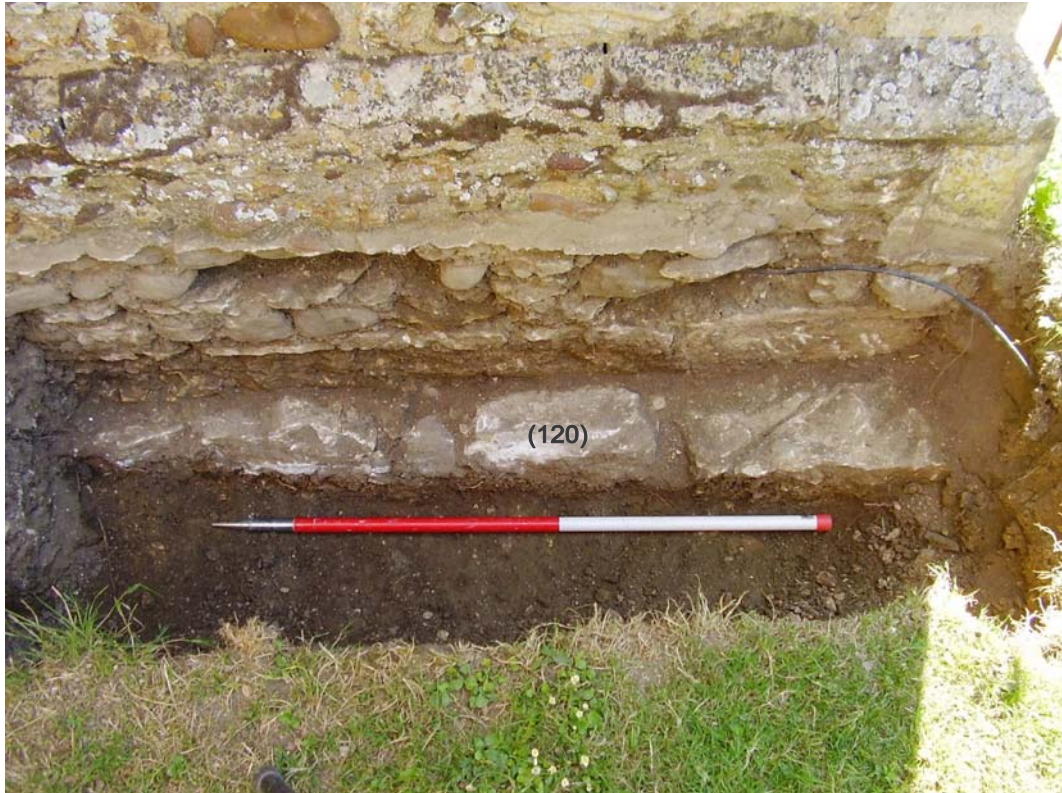


Plate 7: Foundation plinth (120) beneath west wall of south porch Scale 1m



Plate 8: Tower padstones (123). Scale 40cm



Plate 9: Tower padstones beneath Buttress 2. Scale 1m



Plate 10: Nave, Buttress 4 and chancel. (post-reinstatement)