

**THE CHURCH OF ST MARGARET OF ANTIOCH
KNOTTING
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
AND INVESTIGATION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by The Churches Conservation Trust to oversee groundworks associated with the refurbishment and repair of the Church of St Margaret of Antioch, Knotting, 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 2009) and Bedford Borough Council's Archaeological Officer as a precaution against the discovery of archaeological remains during the building works.

2. BACKGROUND

The Church of St Margaret lies in the village of Knotting, on Melchbourne Road, and is centred on grid reference TL 00262 63473 (Figure 1).

The Grade I listed building consists of a nave, chancel, south transept, west tower and south porch. The church is believed to have been built around 1140-70. The nave is probably Norman, with the transept dating to the 13th century. At the same time, the chancel was lengthened and realigned, incorporating a stub of the Norman south wall. The tower was probably built in 1615, as dated on the parapet (CCC 2006).

3. DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

The building works requiring monitoring comprised both internal and external excavations (Figure 2). Inside the church, the works comprised the removal of the floor and the reduction of the ground level by approximately 0.3m in the transept and 0.5m in an adjoining portion of the nave.

Outside the church the works comprised the excavation of three exploratory test pits, followed by pits for three soakaways and associated inspection chambers, and trenches for a French drain and connecting pipe runs.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring took place during January, February and June 2010. The methods employed during the project complied with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (1999), English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991), and Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (2001).

The bulk of the excavation work was carried out by the building contractor under archaeological supervision. The excavation of the external test pits, soakaways and French drain trenches was carried out principally by machine. Internal excavations were carried out by hand. Exposed features and deposits of archaeological interest were cleaned and investigated where necessary by the supervising archaeologist.

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



5. RESULTS

5.1 External Works

Test Pit 1

Test pit 1 measured 0.7m x 1.9m x 0.8m deep. Yellow brick paving on a concrete bed overlay a ceramic drain pipe. Beneath this was mid yellow/brown silty clay. No archaeological features or finds were present.

Test Pit 2

Test pit 2 measured 0.8m x 1.9m x 0.8m deep. The same deposit encountered in test pit 1 was found beneath 0.2m of concrete. No archaeological features or finds were present.

Test Pit 3

Test pit 3 measured 0.9m x 1.3m x 0.6m deep. A disturbed mid brown sandy silt deposit containing frequent small tile fragments was encountered beneath approximately 0.18m of turf and concrete.

Soakaway 1

Soakaway 1 measured 2.4m x 3.2m x 1.0m deep. Approximately 0.2m of topsoil overlay yellow/brown silty clay subsoil. Undisturbed geological deposits comprising light brown silty clay were encountered in the base of the excavation. Two sherds of pottery from a shell-tempered jug (type B07¹), dating to the 12th–13th centuries, were recovered from the subsoil.

Soakaway 2

Soakaway 2 measured 2.2m x 3.2m x 1.0m deep. Approximately 0.3m of topsoil overlay yellow/brown silty clay subsoil which contained frequent fragments of disarticulated human bone. Two nails and a dark linear stain were revealed in the base of the excavation. It is possible that they represent the outline and remains of a coffin.

Soakaway 3

Soakaway 3 measured 2.5m x 5.3m x 1.0m deep. Approximately 0.2m of topsoil overlay 0.8m of yellow/brown silty clay subsoil. Undisturbed geological deposits comprising light brown silty clay were encountered in the base of the excavation. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were present.

French Drain

Excavations for the French drain began at the transept (Figures 3-5) and progressed anti-clockwise around the church. The trench measured approximately 0.6m wide and 0.4m deep. It exposed two courses of masonry and the top of a third. The masonry comprised roughly dressed rectangular limestone blocks with the dimensions of the exposed face being a maximum of 0.40m x 0.14m. The lowest courses of the west and south walls of the transept stepped out 0.1–0.15m from the wall above; the visible foundations of the east wall were flush with the overlying stonework.

The lower of the two exposed courses of stonework beneath the south wall of the chancel projected *c.*70mm from the wall above (Figures 6 and 7). This off-set stonework was

¹ Pottery fabric defined in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently held by Albion Archaeology.



present for *c.*4.85m from the junction with the transept and comprised irregular, mostly roughly dressed, limestone blocks with the largest measuring 0.37m long and 0.1m high. At the end of the plinth were two square blocks that projected 0.16m from the face of the wall (Figure 8). The upper of the two blocks was squared and measured 0.20m long and 0.09m high. It had two finely finished faces with fine diagonal tool marks. The exposed foundation masonry beyond these blocks was stepped in *c.*60mm from the wall above. A small section was investigated in detail and found to comprise three courses of roughly dressed limestone measuring *c.*50–80mm high and 0.15m long.

The south-east corner of the chancel was supported by two large pieces of reused stonework (Figure 9). The upper piece comprised a large squared block; its exposed face was 0.22m wide and 0.18m high and was finished with broad diagonal tool marks. Below this was a piece of medieval limestone coffin lid with part of an incised cross in its upper surface (Figure 10). The stone was 0.10m thick and chamfered at the edge.

The off-set masonry plinth of irregular stone blocks was again present in the trench along the east wall of the chancel (Figure 11). Some of the stones were finely dressed with one having a chamfered edge.

The trench along the northern wall of the chancel and nave varied in width and was up to 1.2m wide in places. This was to accommodate the removal of an existing apron of concrete that abutted the church wall. The exposed masonry in the north wall of the chancel was flush with the wall above and constructed almost entirely of thin slabs of limestone, *c.*40–50mm thick (Figures 12 - 14). Some larger blocks with smooth faces were present. The exception to this was at the north-east corner of the chancel where there was a block of undressed ironstone.

The offset foundation plinth was again present beneath the north wall of the nave, from its north-east corner to a point where there was a clear change in the fabric of the wall above (Figures 16 and 18). The masonry comprised thin slabs above two courses of larger limestone blocks, roughly squared with occasional smooth, dressed faces. Beyond this, the exposed foundation was again flush with the wall above and comprised irregular courses of limestone slabs. The foundation of the north-west corner of the nave was more substantial and corresponded with the buttress above (Figure 19). It comprised three stepped courses of large, roughly tooled and squared, limestone blocks, with the lower course projecting 0.2m from the wall above. The largest of the blocks measured 0.45m long and 0.18m high.

The exposed stonework of the tower comprised two courses of large, roughly squared limestone blocks, flush with the wall above, sitting on a course of larger blocks projecting up to 0.25m from the wall (Figures 19 and 20). These foundations were not keyed into the stonework of the nave. Single, very large stones measuring *c.*0.65m x 0.38m x 0.12m high were located at both the outer corners of the tower.

The south-west buttressed corner of the nave was supported in a similar fashion to the opposite corner, with the exposed foundations comprising three stepped courses of roughly squared limestone blocks, with the lower course projecting up to 0.20m from the wall above (Figure 21).



The exposed foundation of the south wall of the nave and the west wall of the porch were flush with the wall above and comprise three or four courses of roughly dressed masonry blocks similar in character and construction to the wall above (Figure 22).

5.2 Internal Works

The internal groundworks comprised the removal of flooring and the reduction of ground level in the transept and an adjoining portion of the nave (Figure 2).

Approximately 0.3m of sandy soil containing frequent fragments of stone rubble was excavated from within the transept (Figure 23). Excavations stopped at the level of a compacted dark grey soil surface. Finds from within the excavated deposit comprised two pottery sherds, a peg tile fragment and an incomplete ceramic floor tile. The pottery comprised a 12th–13th-century jug handle in a shell-tempered fabric (type B07), and a Potterspury ware body sherd (fabric C10) of mid-13th to later 14th-century date. The roof tile is likely to date from the late medieval period onwards; the floor tile is of uncertain date. The exposed transept wall base comprised four courses of roughly dressed limestone masonry.

The ground level of a 3m x 2.3m area in the nave between the transept and the central aisle was reduced by 0.5m in total (Figure 24). Material removed included the remains of a previous ceramic tiled floor which lay 0.1m beneath the existing paved floor and its mortar bedding layer. The tiles were made of gault clay and were set on a thin layer of white mortar, which overlay a levelling layer of loose pink mortar/rubble, which in turn overlay the footings of the demolished nave wall (see below). The tiles are of uncertain date and no complete examples were present. The available dimensions were c.0.2m x 40mm thick. Beneath the mortar/rubble was the same compact soil deposit seen in the transept. The excavations continued into this soil layer by a further 0.14m and from this deposit a large piece of medieval limestone coffin lid was recovered (Figure 28). The fragment represented the bottom third of the lid and measured 0.31m wide at its narrowest point to 0.37m wide at its broken edge. The stone was chamfered along the edges and was 0.1m thick.

A large void appeared along the aisle side of the excavation, exposing a partially collapsed, probable burial vault located beneath the nave floor (Figure 24). The vault was examined by torch through the opening. It was brick-built and capped at both ends by limestone slabs. Above this was a soil infill which lay beneath further stone slabs that formed the nave floor. The middle capping stone for the vault appeared to have collapsed at some time in the past taking with it a large amount of the soil infill. This led to the creation of the void beneath the slabs of the nave floor, and the exposure of the vault in the northern edge of the excavations. No human remains were visible in the vault, although the base of the chamber could not be seen.

The eastern side of the excavations exposed the base of the nave wall and southern chancel arch respond. The exposed stonework for the respond comprised a moulded and finely dressed plinth stone supported by rubble masonry (Figure 29). The exposed nave wall foundation comprised 3-4 courses of roughly dressed masonry rubble.

Also exposed within the ground reduction excavations were the remains of the footings of the nave south wall, which would have been removed when the transept was constructed (Figures 23 - 27). A single course of masonry, comprising large limestone slabs, was uncovered along most of its length. At the western end, this course was set upon a short



length of offset stones projecting 0.2m from the face of the stones above. Set upon each end of the demolished wall foundation were the footings for the transept arch responds. The eastern footing (Figure 25) comprised what appeared to be a partially exposed moulded quatrefoil column base set upon rubble masonry. This was slightly offset from the polygonal respond above. The western footing (Figure 26) appeared to comprise moderately large pieces of stone rubble. Both footings were offset from the demolished wall foundation by c.0.2–0.3m in the direction of the nave.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological investigations found little of interest in the soakaway excavations. Disarticulated human remains and a possible grave were identified to the south-west of the church in one of the three soakaway pits.

The excavation of the French drain trench enabled the full circumference of the church foundations to be recorded. The full depth of the wall foundations were never exposed in the works, although they were deep enough to show variations in construction. This was principally demonstrated by the presence or absence of a course of offset masonry, employed to spread the weight of the wall above. Its presence does not appear to correspond completely with any particular phase of construction or element of the church, although it is consistently present where there is an increased load above, such as the tower, gable ends, and corner buttresses. Its presence elsewhere may reflect construction episodes in the building's history such as the extension of the chancel and the rebuilding of the nave north wall. Re-used architectural masonry was present throughout the foundations as exemplified by the presence of finely dressed and occasionally moulded stones.

The excavation works within the church revealed several interesting aspects of its history including an early floor level in the nave, architectural elements of the chancel and transept arches and the remnants of the demolished south wall of the nave. Later additions to the church such as a brick burial vault were also uncovered.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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CCC (Council for the Care of Churches) 2006. *Pastoral Measure Report: Knotting St Margaret.*

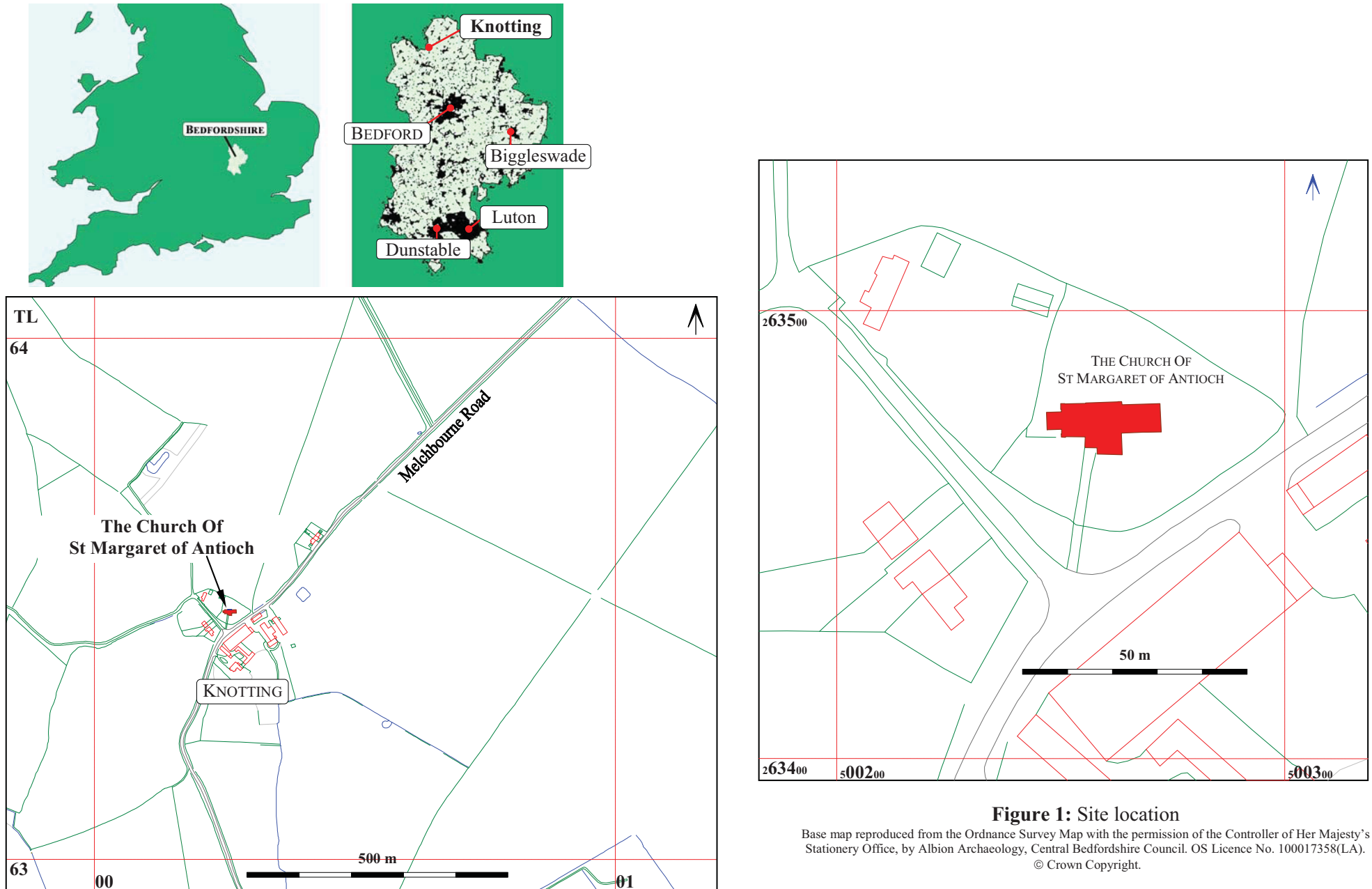


Figure 1: Site location

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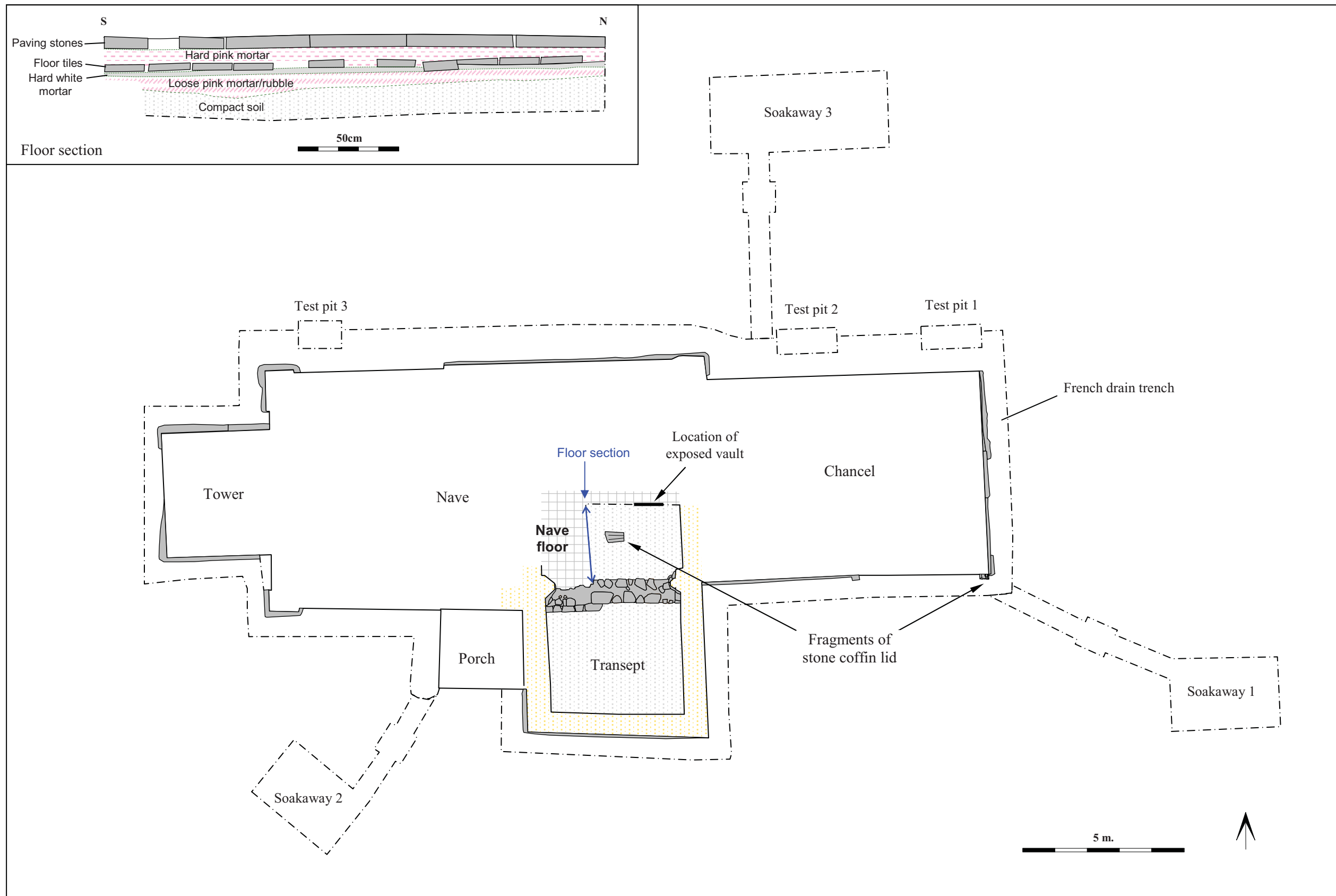


Figure 2: Results of investigations



Figure 3: Porch and transept. 1m scale



Figure 4: Transept east wall. 1m scale



Figure 5: Transept south-east corner. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 6: Transept and chancel south corner. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 7: chancel south wall central area. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 8: Transept south wall central area detail. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 9: Chancel south-east corner



Figure 10: Stone coffin lid beneath south-east corner of chancel. 0.20m scale



Figure 11: Chancel east wall. 1m scale



Figure 12: Chancel north wall. 1m scale



Figure 13: Chancel north-east corner. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 14: Chancel north-west corner. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 15: North side of church



Figure 16: Nave north-east corner. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 17: Nave north wall central east area. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 18: Nave north wall central west area. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 19: Nave and tower north-west corner. 1m scale



Figure 20: Tower west wall. 1m scale



Figure 21: Nave south-west corner buttress. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 22: Porch west wall. 1m and 0.20m scales



Figure 23: Transept excavations viewed from nave



Figure 24: Nave excavations viewed from transept



Figure 25: Exposed wall foundation looking east



Figure 26: Exposed wall foundation looking west

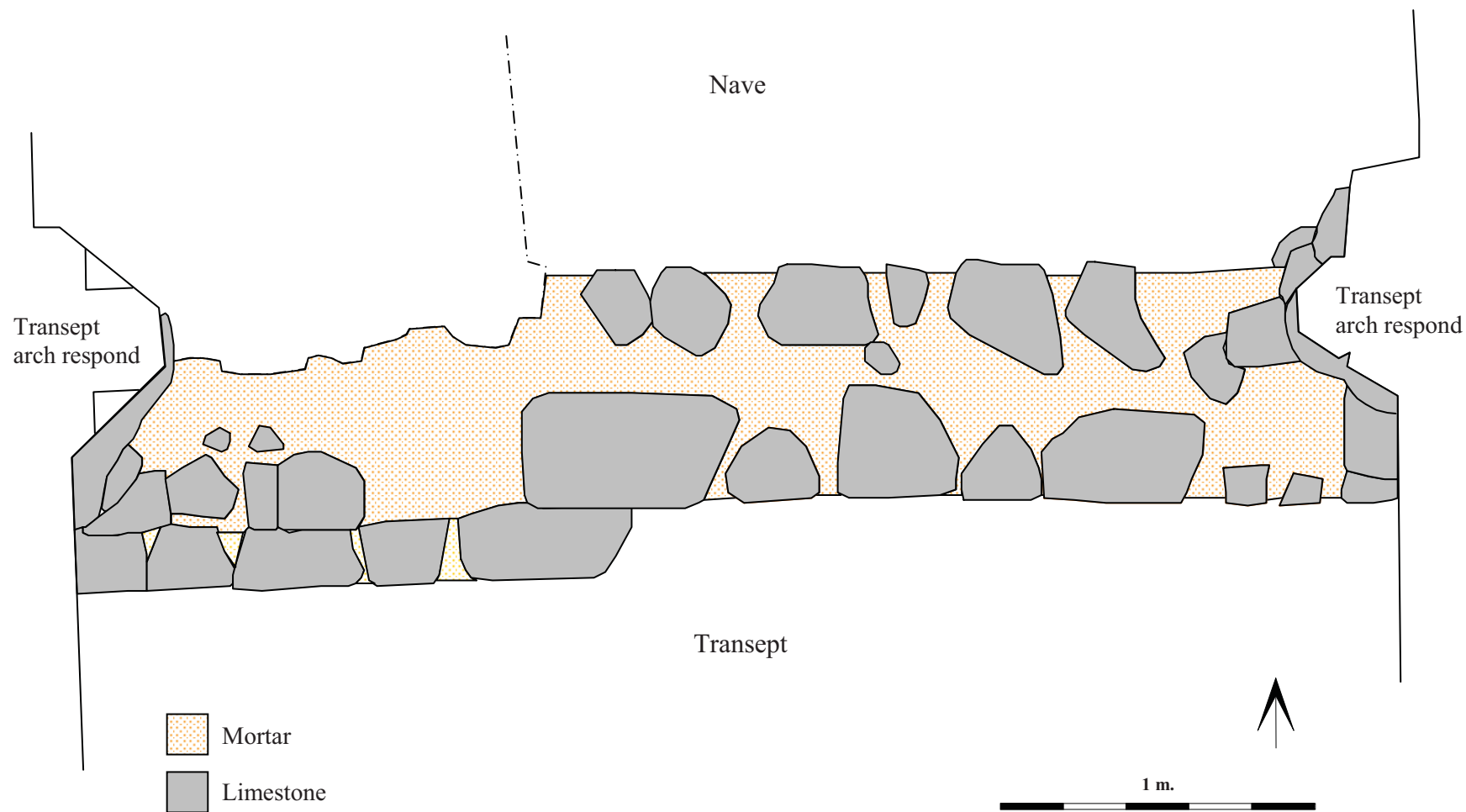


Figure 27: Plan of exposed wall foundation



Figure 28: Stone coffin lid recovered from nave excavations. 0.40m scale



Figure 29: Exposed chancel arch respond footing. 0.40m scale