



# Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological evaluation of land adjacent to  
Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney, Milton Keynes  
August 2011



## Northamptonshire Archaeology

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Northamptonshire  
County Council

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Report 11/191

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project title	Archaeological evaluation of land adjacent to Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney. August 2011	
Short description	An archaeological evaluation of land adjacent to Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney, was carried out in advance of the construction of an extension to the existing buildings. The evaluation revealed layers of grave soil and made ground, cut by 19th century brick vaults.	
Project type	Test pit evaluation	
Site Status		
Previous work	None	
Current land use	Church yard	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	None	
Significant finds	None	
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes	
Site address	Market place, Olney	
Post code		
OS co-ordinates	SP 88871 51349	
Area (sq m/ha)	0.03ha	
Height aOD	51m	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Milton Keynes Council	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Amir Bassir	
Project Manager	Ian Meadows	
Sponsor or funding body	Sutcliff Baptist Church	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	15/08/2011	
End date	19/08/2011	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location (AYBCM: 2011.231)</b>	<b>Contents</b>
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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF  
LAND ADJACENT TO SUTCLIFF BAPTIST CHURCH,  
OLNEY, MILTON KEYNES  
AUGUST 2011**

**Abstract**

*In August 2011, an archaeological test pit evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land adjacent to Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney, Milton Keynes. The evaluation was carried out in response to the submission of a planning application for the extension of the existing building. The evaluation revealed several 18th-19th-century, brick, burial vaults, some of which have been truncated by more recent activity. The remains of earlier burials were found at a greater depth at the western extent of the evaluation.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

In August 2011, an archaeological test pit evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on land adjacent to Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney, Milton Keynes (NGR: SP 8886 5134, Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Sutcliff Baptist Church and was undertaken to inform a planning application for the proposed extension of the existing church building.

The scope of works was outlined in the brief (Crank 2010) issued by Milton Keynes Council's Senior Archaeological Officer, Nick Crank and detailed in the specification prepared by NA (July 2011). The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the presence of any archaeological features or deposits within the development area and to date and characterise their extent, depth of burial and state of preservation.

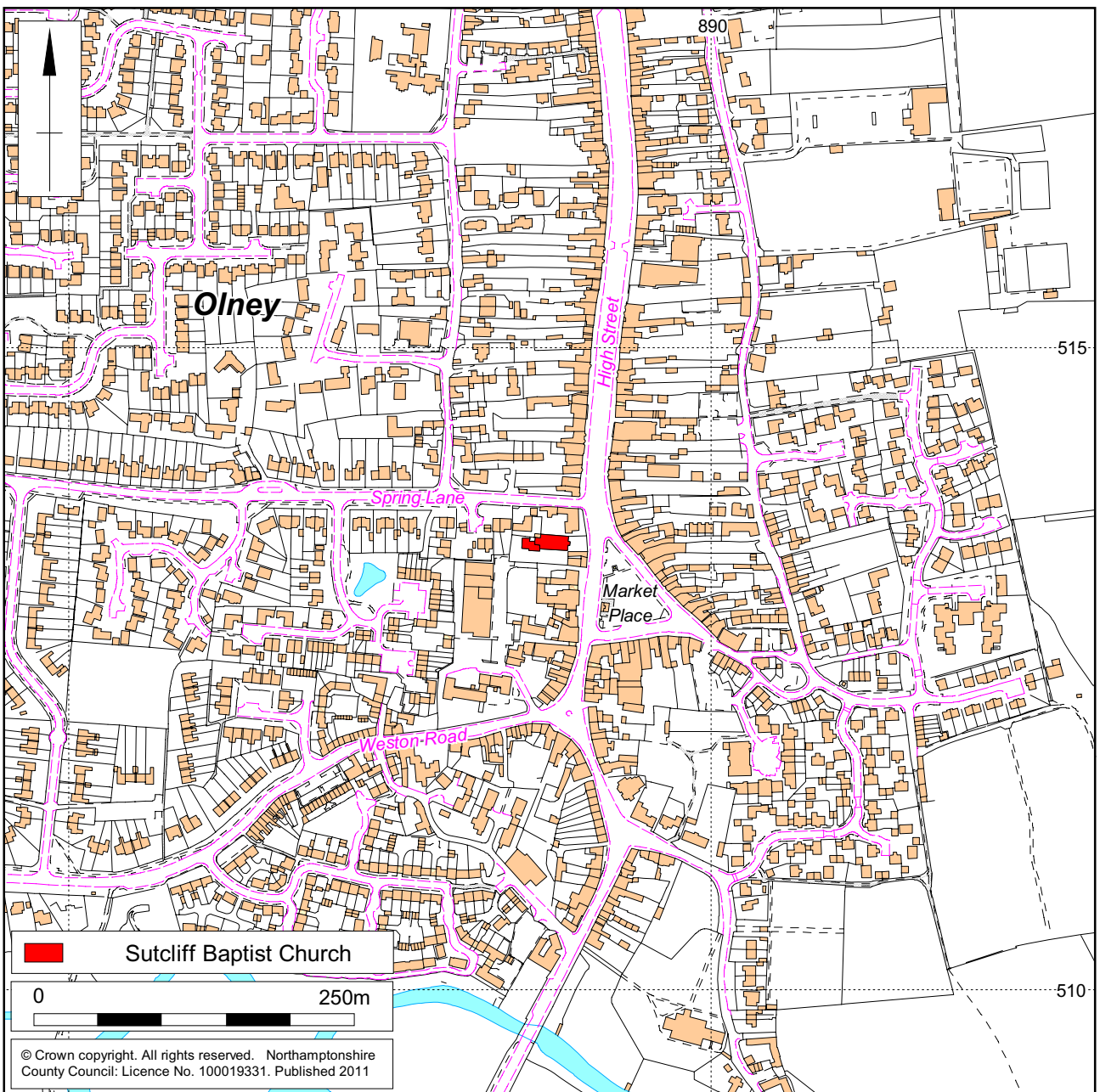
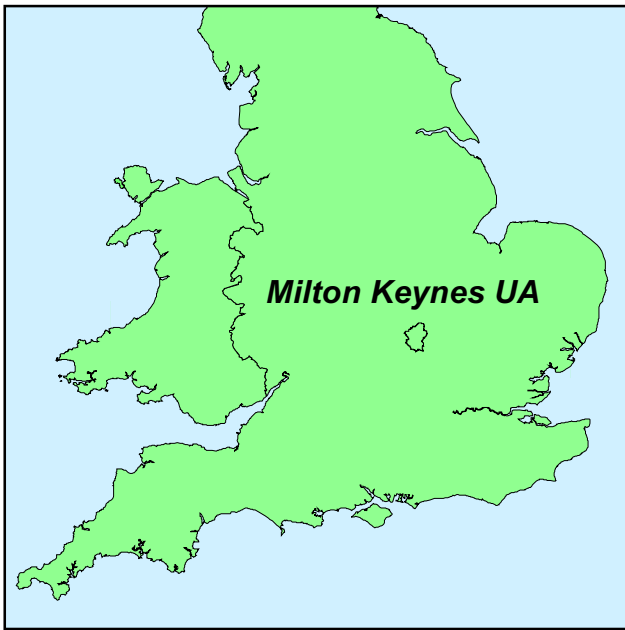
**2 BACKGROUND**

**2.1 Topography and geology**

The proposed development site is located to the west of Olney market place and immediately to the south of Sutcliff Baptist Church (Fig 1).

From the eastern edge of the site the ground rises gently towards the west where the ground has been artificially raised. Ground level lies at an average height of 51m aOD. At the time of the evaluation the site was grassed.

The underlying geology comprises the Great Oolite Group (limestone, sandstone, argillaceous rock), overlain by sand and gravel ([www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex)).



Scale 1:5000

Site location Fig 1

## 2.2 Historical and archaeological background

Little evidence of prehistoric activity has been recorded around Olney. However Roman-British occupation is well attested with a Romano-British settlement of up to 25ha identified to the north of the present town at Ash Furlong through aerial photography, fieldwalking and numerous interventions. Finds of Roman building material are commonly found within the town itself.

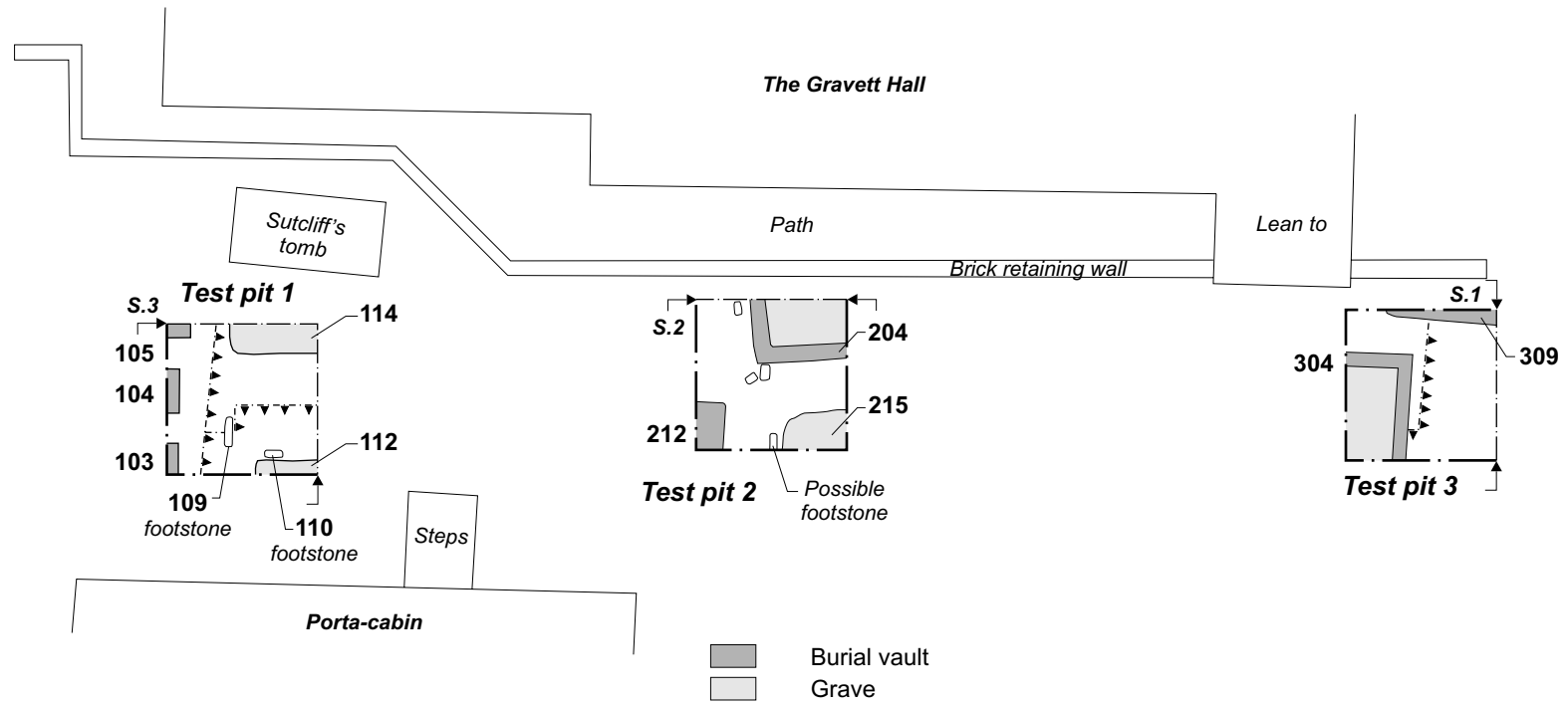
Olney is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086AD as *Olnei*. It was a thriving medieval town owned by the Earls Of Chester and evidence of significant medieval activity has been recorded during archaeological investigations nearby at Dagnall House and 1 Market Place (Crank 2010). Properties adjacent to the site include listed buildings of the 17th and 18th centuries.

A Baptist Chapel was established on the site in 1694 and has remained through at least four iterations. The proposed development area is indicated as possibly containing burials in a former Baptist graveyard, indeed photography supplied by the client shows gravestones propped against the southern boundary wall of the church and *in situ*.

## 3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Three test pits, measuring 2m by 2m (total area 12m<sup>2</sup>), were hand excavated in accordance with the trench plan approved by the Archaeological Officer (Fig 2). The test pits were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. A hand-drawn plan of all archaeological features was made at scale 1:50 and was related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. Recording followed standard NA procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2006). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. Context sheets were cross-referenced to scale plans, section drawings and photographs. Photography was with 35mm black and white film and colour slides, supplemented with digital images. Sections were drawn at scale 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate and related to Ordnance Survey datum

All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2010) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008).



Scale 1:100

Trench locations showing excavated features

Fig 2



## 4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

### 4.1 General stratigraphy

The earliest deposit encountered in the test pits was a layer of grave soil which consisted of a moderately compacted, dark grey-brown clayey silt and in test pit 3, contained frequent disarticulated human remains (all reinterred), iron nails and animal bone. The earliest burials uncovered during excavation were cut into this grave soil. These burials were unvaulted and disturbed by later burials. The grave soil and early burials were sealed by a layer of imported material to make up or raise the ground. This layer was a highly compacted sandy silt containing frequent flint, sandstone, ironstone and limestone inclusions. This made ground was cut by the remains of several early-mid 19th century brick-lined vaults which also disturbed the underlying grave soil and earlier burials. These vaults were overlain by a subsoil of dark grey-brown clayey silt.

The remains of a gravel path were uncovered in test pit 3, overlying the subsoil and a thin layer of buried soil. This path was up to 0.1m thick and was overlain by a topsoil of dark greyish-brown clayey silt containing occasional flint, sandstone and ironstone gravel.

The test pit locations are shown in Figure 2 and an inventory of contexts is provided in the Appendix.

### 4.2 The archaeological evidence

#### *Test pit 1*

Test pit 1 was located at the west of the development area (Fig 2). The earliest deposit was a dark brown clay loam (108) which contained abundant brick and stone fragments. This was cut by two unvaulted graves [112] and [114] which were uncovered at a depth of roughly 0.5m (Fig 3, Section 3). Grave [112] was located in the south-eastern corner of the trench. It was filled by a dark grey, clayey silt (113). Grave [114] was located in the north-eastern corner of the trench. It was filled by a mid orange-brown sandy silt (115). Both [112] and [114] were sealed by a subsoil of made ground (102). The subsoil was a mid brown, sandy clay loam with abundant brick and stone fragments and represented the artificial raising of the level of the churchyard. The footstone of an earlier burial [109] was found in the south-eastern corner of the trench. This was also sealed by (102) and belonged to the earlier phase of burials, though no grave cut was associated with it. The eroded remains of carving and the initials "IF" were visible on the stone. A second footstone [110] was found to the south east of [109], close to grave [112] though it was unclear if they were associated. Footstone [110] didn't appear to be *in situ*.

The remains of three brick-lined vaults [103], [104], [105] were present against the western edge of the trench. All three were on an east-west alignment. The tops of these were cleaned off and the trench was stepped approximately 0.2-0.3m to the east. The bricks used in the construction were handmade unfrosted, red bricks and were bound with a pale yellow-white mortar. Vault [103] also incorporated a piece of moulded Victorian path edging and pieces of broken tile into its structure. These later burials cut through the made up ground (102) and were sealed by a modern mid brown sandy clay (116). This deposit represents levelling of the churchyard after the clearance of headstones and was overlain by a topsoil of dark brown sandy clay loam (101).



Test pit 1 showing burials [103], [104], [105], [112] and footstones, looking south Fig 3

### ***Test pit 2***

Test pit 2 contained the remains of two brick-lined vaults [204] and [212] and an unvaulted burial [215] (Fig 2, Fig 7; Section 2). The excavation was stepped around the brick vaults which were not themselves excavated. Vault [212] was located in the south-west corner of the trench and contained fills (203) and (213). Fill (213) was a mid dark grey, clay silt which was deposited between the brick vault and the construction cut. The vault was constructed with red, handmade, unfrogged bricks with a pale yellow mortar bonding. The vault was filled with (203), a mid-dark grey silt containing numerous fragments of stone and brick. The whole grave was sealed by a layer of compact, sandy clay (202) containing more modern debris including brick, porcelain, nails and gravel. Layer (202) represents artificial raising of the churchyard.

Grave [204] was located in the northern half of the trench. It comprised a construction cut [204], the brick vault itself (205) and a backfill for the cut (214). The vault was constructed from red, handmade, unfrogged bricks with a pale yellow mortar bonding. The backfill of the construction cut (214), was a mid grey-brown silt. Overlying the brick vault was a fill of disturbed, dark grey sandy clay, grave soil (206) which contained 19th-century debris. The burial was sealed by a mid orange-brown sandy silt (207), which contained debris such as brick fragments, nails, rubble and pottery. Layer (207) was overlain by topsoil and partially overlies (202). This layer may have represented backfilling of the vault in order to level the ground surface.

Grave [215] was located in the south-eastern corner of the trench. No remains of a vault were uncovered. It contained a fill (216), of dark grey-brown silty clay with abundant gravel. A stone uncovered to the west of [215] may have been a footstone but it was unclear if it was originally associated with grave [215]



Test pit 2 showing burials [212] and [204], looking west Fig 4

### Test pit 3

Test pit 3 contained two brick vaults [304] and (309) and the remains of a gravel path (302) (Fig 2, Fig 7 Section 1). The earliest deposit present in the test pit was a mid-dark brown, moderately compacted clay silt (307). This was a disturbed grave soil containing numerous fragments of disarticulated human remains, fragments of animal bone and iron nails (all reinterred). This was overlain by a highly compacted make up layer (306) of sandy clay with a high concentration of gravel and occasional fragments of animal bone and nails.

Vault [304] was cut through both (306) and (307) and was sealed by the subsoil (303). The vault structure comprised red, handmade, unfrosted bricks [314] of which eight courses were exposed (Fig 6). The construction cut [304], was filled with a compact, yellow-brown clay (308), which was up cast natural material, and a moderately compacted, mid dark grey silt with occasional gravel inclusions (312). These were covered by a mid grey-brown sandy silt containing fragments of brick (305).

Another brick vault (309) was revealed in the north section of the trench. A construction cut was not visible in section and the excavation was stepped around the vault. At least two courses of handmade, unfrosted, red bricks with a pale yellow mortar bonding were present. This was surrounded by a fill of tightly packed limestone fragments in a mid orange-brown, sandy silt matrix (311), and a mid grey brown silt (315) which contained occasional fragments of brick, rubble and animal bone.

Overlying the vaults was a subsoil of mid brown sandy clay (303) containing frequent fragments of broken bricks, tile and other debris. The gravel path was located in the south-eastern corner of the test pit and overlay the subsoil (303) and a thin layer of buried soil (313). It was approximately 0.1m at the thickest point and tapered out westward. Overlying the gravel path was a layer of topsoil (301) which was a mid-dark grey-brown sandy silt containing infrequent gravel and occasional modern pottery and debris.

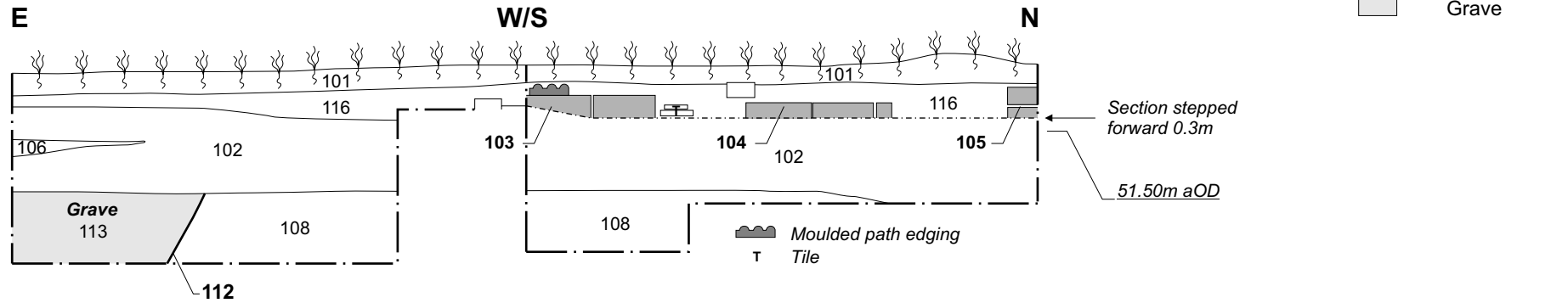


Test pit 3, burials [304] and [309], looking north Fig 5

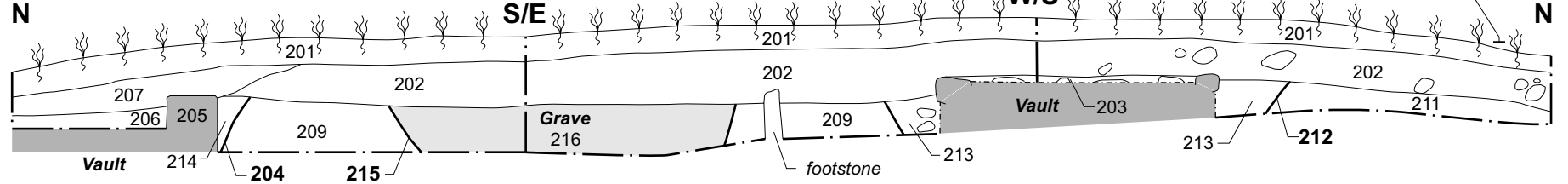


Test pit 3, burial [304], looking south Fig 6

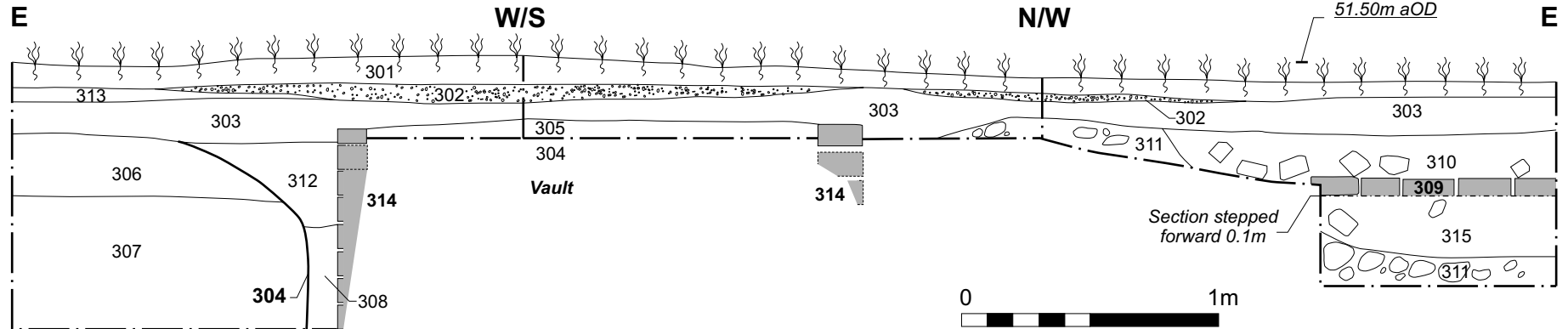
### Test pit 1, Section 3



### Test pit 2, Section 2



### Test pit 3, Section 1



## 5 REGISTER OF GRAVES

The archaeological remains uncovered during the evaluation can be compared to the written evidence held in the Olney Baptist Church, Register of Graves (Bowden 2010). The positions of the rows of burials can be roughly extrapolated according to the position of Sutcliff's tomb and the entrance gate (Fig 10). The register estimates the minimum total graveyard occupancy at 235 individuals. The estimated number of graves between rows 1-13 is 149.

Test pit 1 is positioned roughly over row 13. The register estimates 23 individuals are interred in row 13, distributed into eight burials. Only the tomb of John and Jane Sutcliff (1814) remains *in situ* (Figs 8 and 9). Test pit 2 roughly overlies rows 10 and 11 which contain 46 individuals between 17 graves. Test pit 3 is positioned over rows seven or eight. Row 7 contains 14 individuals in nine graves and row eight contains seven individuals in four graves.

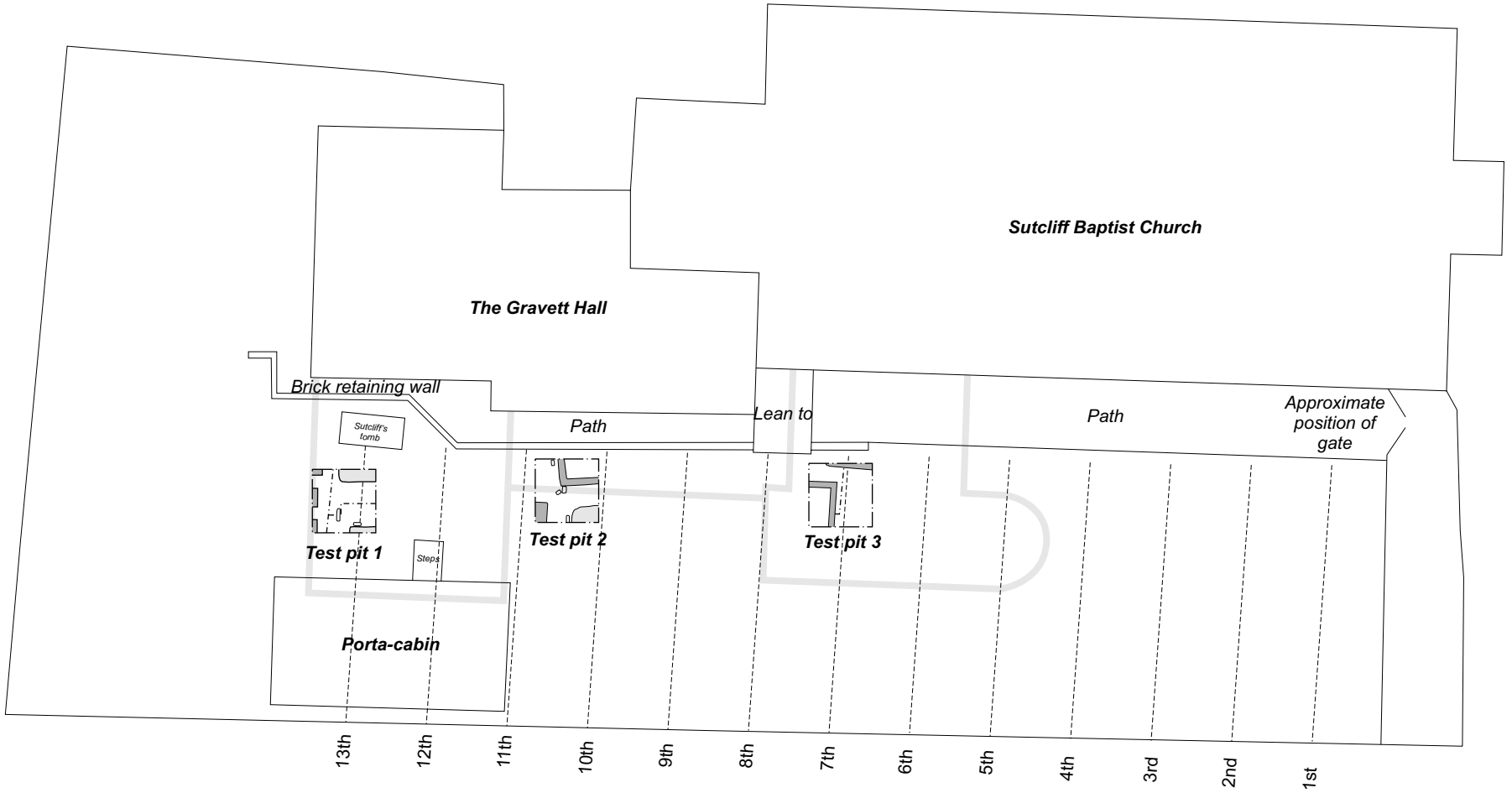
None of the vaults or burials uncovered in the evaluation contained anything which would identify the occupant. The initials IF on the footstone [109], trench 1, could not be positively attributed to a burial in the register, though Isaac Clifton (1851) and Thomas Field's wife (1846) are present in the register for row 13.



View of the churchyard with the tomb of John Sutcliff to the extreme left, date unknown Fig 8



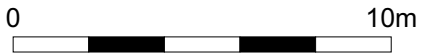
View of the churchyard, date unknown Fig 9




Scale 1:200

Location of the trenches in relation to approximate rows of burials

Fig 10



 Approximate outline of proposed building extension

## 6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation revealed the remains of several late 18th, early-mid 19th-century brick vaults and burials. These are present in two phases, those buried before the raising of the churchyard and those buried afterward. The earlier burials were sealed by layers of made up ground through which the later brick vaults and burials were cut. The raising of the level of the churchyard possibly corresponds to the Burial Act of 1857, though the tomb of John Sutcliff (1818) is level with the modern, raised ground surface. It is possible that the tomb was also raised at the same time, in order to avoid partially burying it as it is the eponymous chapel.

It is likely that there is a high concentration of burials remaining in the churchyard. The register of graves indicates up to 149 burials in the area of the proposed development.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Bowden, J, 2010 *Olney Baptist Church, Register of Graves*

### Websites

BGS 2009 <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html> British Geological Survey website, accessed 28/8/11

### Maps

SSEW 1983 *Soils of Eastern England*, Sheet 4, Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1:250,000



## Appendix: Summary of contexts

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
1	2mx2m	488853/ 251339	51.51m aOD	Natural not reached
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
101	Topsoil	Dark brown sandy clay loam	0.1-0.08m thick	---
102	Raised ground/ imported material	Mid brown sandy clay loam, abundant brick and limestone fragments	0.35-0.28m thick	---
103	Brick vault	Brick vault incorporating 19th century moulded path edging and tile	0.5m width	
104	Brick vault	19th-century brick burial vault	0.55m width	---
105	Brick vault	19th-century brick burial vault	Width not fully revealed	---
106	Lens	Orange sandy clay, brick and mortar fragments	0.03-0.08m thick	---
107	Lens	Orange-brown sandy clay, brick and tile fragments	0.04m-0.08m thick	---
108	Grave soil	Dark brown clay loam, limestone fragments	0.25m excavated	---
109	Footstone	Footstone for 18th-19th century burial. Contains initials "IF"	---	---
110	Footstone	Footstone for 18th-19th century burial. Not <i>in situ</i>	---	---
111	VOID	---	---	---
112	Cut of grave	Cut of 18th-19th century burial.	Not fully excavated	---
113	Fill of grave 112	Dark grey clayey silt	Not fully excavated	---
114	Cut of grave	Cut of 18th-19th century burial	Not fully excavated	---
115	Fill of grave 113	Mid orange-brown sandy silt, limestone inclusions	Not fully excavated	---
116	Raised ground/ imported material	Mid brown sandy clay.	0.05m-0.15m thick	---

<b>Trench No</b>	<b>Length, width &amp; alignment</b>	<b>NGR</b>	<b>Surface height</b>	<b>Depth &amp; height of natural</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>2mx2m</b>	<b>488860/ 251339</b>	<b>51.65m aOD</b>	<b>Natural not reached</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>Context type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Artefacts/Samples</b>
201	Topsoil	Dark grey-brown sandy clay loam	0.1m thick	---
202	Subsoil/ raised ground	Compact sandy clay with abundant modern debris	0.15m-0.2m thick	---
203	Imported material deposited above vault 212	Sandy silt with abundant concrete and stone.	Not fully excavated	---
204	Construction cut	Cut of 19th-century burial vault	Not fully excavated	---
205	Brick vault	Brick vault, encircling a burial. Red, handmade, unfrogged bricks	Not fully excavated	---
206	Grave soil, fill of 204	Disturbed, dark sandy clay with modern debris	<0.m thick	---
207	Imported material/ raised ground	Mid orange brown sandy silt containing modern debris	0.05m-0.2m thick	---
208	Same as 209	---	---	---
209	Grave soil/ raised ground	Compacted, mid orange brown clay with abundant gravel	0.15m-0.2m thick	---
210	Same as 216	---	---	---
211	Grave soil/ raised ground	Dark grey sandy silt containing burnt material, charcoal and 18th-19th-century debris.		
212	Construction cut	Cut of burial vault	1.6m width Not fully excavated	---
213	Fill of 212	Dark grey-brown clayey silt between construction cut and brick vault	Not fully excavated	---
214	Fill of 204	Mid grey-brown sandy silt between construction cut and brick vault	Not fully excavated	---
215	Cut of burial	Cut of unvaulted burial, sloping sides <45°.	1.35m width Not fully excavated	---
216	Fill of 215	Compacted, dark grey-brown silty clay, occasional gravel	1.35m width Not fully excavated	---

<b>Trench No</b>	<b>Length, width &amp; alignment</b>	<b>NGR</b>	<b>Surface height</b>	<b>Depth &amp; height of natural</b>
3	2mx2m	488868/ 251339	51.65m aOD	Natural not reached
<b>Context</b>	<b>Context type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Artefacts/Samples</b>
301	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	<0.1m thick	---
302	Gravel path	80% mixed gravel, mid grey sandy silt matrix	<0.1m thick Width not fully excavated	---
303	Subsoil/ raised ground	Sandy clay with abundant modern debris and brick and stone fragments	<0.2m thick	---
304	Cut of burial	Cut of 19th-century burial	Full extent not revealed	---
305	Grave soil	Fill of 304. Mid grey-brown sandy clay with brick fragments	1.7m width Not fully excavated	---
306	Raised ground/ imported material	Highly compacted sandy clay with frequent stone inclusions	0.25m thick	---
307	Grave soil	Compacted mid- dark brown clayey silt containing frequent disarticulated human remains, animal bone and iron nails.	>0.5m thick, not fully excavated	All finds reinterred
308	Fill of burial 304	Up cast natural, brown-yellow clay deposited between construction cut and brick vault	<0.11m Not fully excavated	---
309	Brick vault	Disturbed brick vault. Red, handmade, unfroged bricks with yellow mortar bonding	Extent not fully revealed.	---
310	Fill of 309. Grave soil	Dark grey-brown sandy silt	0.17m thick	---
311	Fill of 309	Tightly packed limestone fragments in a sandy silt matrix. Deposited between vault 309 and construction cut (not seen)	Not fully excavated	---
312	Fill of burial 304	Mid dark grey-brown silt containing occasional gravel and disarticulated human remains	0.55m width 0.3m thick	All finds reinterred
313	Buried soil/ lens	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	<0.8m thick	---

314	Brick vault, Fill of 304	Red, handmade, unfrogged bricks with light yellow mortar	2m width, minimum 8 courses. Not fully excavated	---
315	Fill of 309	Mid- dark grey-brown silt with occasional animal bone and mixed gravel. Deposited between brick vault and construction cut (not seen)	0.25m thick Not fully excavated	---