



Northamptonshire  
County Council

# Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological evaluation  
on the site of the former church,  
Hartwell, Buckinghamshire  
May 2007



Joe Prentice

September 2007

Report 07/143

## Northamptonshire Archaeology

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**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY  
MAY 2007**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON THE SITE OF  
THE FORMER CHURCH AT HARTWELL,  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
MAY 2007**

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**QUALITY CONTROL**

	Print name	Signed	Date
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Verified by	Iain Soden		
Approved by	Steve Parry		

**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project name	Archaeological evaluation on the site of the former church, Hartwell,, Buckinghamshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	The medieval church at Hartwell, Buckinghamshire was demolished in the 1750's when a new church was constructed close by. Archaeological evaluation was carried out to establish the survival or otherwise of the original church's structure. A single trench found deep demolition layers but no evidence of walls or floor levels indicating that demolition had been extensive.	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	Registered Park and Garden (English Heritage)	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	No	
Current Land use	Shrubbery	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Medieval building	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	No	
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Buckinghamshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Hartwell House Hotel, Hartwell,	
Study area (sq.m or ha)		
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. numbers)	47943 21252	
Height OD		
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	Joe Prentice	
Director/Supervisor	Joe Prentice	
Project Manager	Steve Parry	
Sponsor or funding body	Mr R Broyd / Mr E Throssell	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	May 2007	
End date	May 2007	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location (Accession no.)</b>	<b>Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title		
Serial title & volume		
Author(s)		
Page numbers		
Date		



# Contents

1	INTRODUCTION
2	BACKGROUND
3	THE EVALUATION
4	FINDS
5	CONCLUSIONS
	BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Figures

Fig 1:	Site location
Fig 2:	Location of trench
Fig 3:	Section of trench
Fig 4:	Conjectural plan of the church

## Plates

Plate 1:	The trench looking north-west
Plate 2:	Gilded copper alloy button with Bourbon emblem

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON THE SITE OF THE FORMER  
CHURCH,  
HARTWELL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

*Abstract*

*The medieval church at Hartwell, Buckinghamshire was demolished in the 1750's when a new church was constructed close by. Archaeological evaluation was carried out to establish the survival or otherwise of the original church's structure. A single trench found deep demolition layers but no evidence of walls or floor levels indicating that demolition had been extensive.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Hartwell House, which lies to the west of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, is owned by the Earnest Cook Trust and is leased to Historic House Hotels who run the property as an hotel (Fig 1, NGR SP 7943 1252). Both the house and much of the gardens have been restored over recent years to a high standard with great emphasis being placed on historic accuracy.
- 1.2 This programme of restoration has been led by Mr Richard Broyd, Chairman of Historic House Hotels, aided by Mr Eric Throssell, M.B.E., F.R.I.B.A. The restoration has been supported by documentary research undertaken by Mr Throssell during which evidence for the former church has emerged.
- 1.3 In early 2007, Mr Throssell approached Northamptonshire Archaeology with the aim of undertaking limited archaeological investigation of the area where the former church was thought to have been. A programme of limited trial excavation was proposed in which a trench was to be placed to identify the former building, its position aided by a previous geophysical survey. The fieldwork was undertaken over the course of three days in May 2007.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Hartwell House (Listed Grade I) was probably built between 1570 and 1617 by Sir Alexander Hampden around the site of a medieval building (English Heritage, Register of Parks and Gardens 2001). In the early seventeenth century the estate passed to the Lee's of East Claydon and Moreton, in whose possession it remained for the next 300 years. After his father's death in 1690, Sir Thomas Lee, second Baronet, created a formal topiary garden of which nothing now appears to survive. The second Baronet died in 1702, when his 15 year old son, also Thomas, inherited the estate. The third Baronet developed his father's garden during the second quarter of the eighteenth century and the development of the landscape continued during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The house was let to the Comte de Provence (later Louis XVIII) between 1809 and 1814. Hartwell was acquired by Earnest Cook in 1938, and was used as an army billet during the Second World War, subsequently becoming a girl's school. Hartwell has been leased to Historic House Hotels since 1987.
- 2.2 The gardens surround the house, and most are now laid to lawn. Some garden buildings survive from the early eighteenth century formal phase, including Gibb's rusticated arch, the Gothic Tower (Gibb's, 1730) and the church of St. Mary (Henry Keene, 1753-55). The

Gothic Revival church concluded a vista from the house and was aligned on Gibb's canal temple and Keene's later bridge, now both gone. The church was roofed until the last war when it is reputed that men arrived one day and announced (spuriously) that they had come from the War Office to remove lead from the roof. This was done and consequently the building rapidly declined until it became a shell with little remaining of the once elaborate internal plasterwork decoration. More recently the church has been repaired and re-roofed and is now in the care of the Redundant Churches Trust.

- 2.3 In 1999 documentary research was carried out which used historic maps and written descriptions to try to more closely identify the area in which the former church stood (Fig 2, Farley and Throssell 2001). A conjectural plan of the church was also created by Mr Throssell using contemporary descriptions, one of which recalled that "The church of Hartwell is a very ordinary building consisting of a body north aisle and chancel with a small building on the south side in which are the seats of family of the Lees. The west wall and roof supports a small wooden turret in which hangs one small bell. The whole is tiled and is only in length 68 foot and in breadth 25 foot" (Fig 4).
- 2.4 Following this research a geophysical survey (resistivity) was carried out across the area where the former church was thought to have stood. The results from this survey included "some of the original churchyard, and may be the site of earlier medieval occupation. These factors may affect the overall level of disturbance visible in the plots, although individual features are difficult to interpret. It is also possible there could have been more recent disturbances at the site, given that we were told by a former estate worker that army huts were erected in or near to this area during the Second World War. The findings from the supplementary magnetometer survey showed numerous strong anomalies which could indicate iron or rubble of recent origin in some areas of the site, but the presumed location of the old church appeared to be comparatively undisturbed" (Farley and Throssell 2001).
- 2.5 An outline of the conjectural church plan was set out on the ground above anomalies which were thought most likely to represent to probable former position of the church.

### **3. THE EVALUATION**

- 3.1 The general objectives of the evaluation were to establish whether any remains of the structure of the church survive, and if so the depth of burial, extent and character of those remains. A trench was placed across what would have been the south wall of the church (Fig 2).
- 3.2 Beneath a shallow topsoil of dark organic loam which contained few inclusions (Tr 1/1, Fig 3). Beneath this a layer of lighter clay loam with small patches of light grey or yellow clay and fragments of degraded stone and tile (Tr 1/2) cut through a dark grey/brown clay loam towards the northern end of the trench Tr 1/3). Layer 2 overlay three parallel features running in an east-west direction, all filled with a dark brown loam (Tr 1/4, 5 and 6). The purpose of these features is unclear and they do not easily relate to what might be expected of robber trenches. The length of the features was not established as all ran across the trench and into either section. Whilst of a similar dimension in width to grave cuts none contained any bone. They were all cut into a mixed layer of degraded limestone and clay (re-deposited natural?) which contained occasional tile fragments (Tr 1/7). The northern of the three features also cut the southern edge of a shallow feature (Tr 1/ 8), which itself cut Tr1/7, and which contained a grey/brown clay loam containing roof tile fragments and pieces of limestone up to 200mm. Both Tr1/7 and 8 lay above a distinctly hard and very compacted layer of degraded stone with occasional patches of lime mortar (Tr1/9). Towards the southern end of the trench the same layer contained rounded pebbles or stone

fragments up to 250mm along with small fragments of red brick across the length of the trench indicating that the layer was not natural bedrock.

#### **4. FINDS**

- 4.1 Pottery. A small assemblage of pottery ranging in date from the Roman to post-medieval periods was recovered during the excavation. The Roman and medieval pottery is clearly residual, and both do no more than suggest settlement near by. The post-medieval pottery confirms the date of the demolition of the church as the majority of it dates from the middle years of the eighteenth century.
- 4.2 Clay tobacco pipes. A small group of 6 clay tobacco pipe fragments were recovered and comprise 5 stem fragments and one complete bowl. This dates to Oswalds type G5 which dates to c. 1640-1660 (Oswald 1975). It therefore appears to be a residual piece and was probably brought in with soil during the landscaping of the area after the demolition of the church.
- 4.3 Other finds. These included two small fragments of glass, one from a window, the other from a vessel. Both are so small as to un-dateable. Two undiagnostic pieces of copper alloy sheet are similarly un-dateable. A gilded copper alloy disc is almost certainly a button (Plate 2). The front is decorated with a stamped image comprising a central oval cartouche within which are three fleur-de-lis. The cartouche is surmounted by a coronet and to either side are swags and flags. Below the cartouche is a Maltese cross above a horizontal bar beneath which is an arch flanked by foliate fronds. The reverse is plain apart from the faint scar of a central stub, presumably the remains of the loop with which the button was sewn onto fabric. It almost certainly dates to the period 1809-1814 when the French Court in exile was resident at Hartwell as it corresponds to the Bourbon coat-of-arms (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). It most likely comes from the livery of an attendant.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The trench found no direct evidence of the former church. However, the depth of the rubble and re-deposited natural show clear evidence of a large amount of disturbance which is difficult to explain other than being part of an extensive programme of destruction followed by landscaping. The documentary research carried out by Mr Throssell based on historic map evidence clearly places the former church in the area and though geophysical survey has been carried out the evidence is equivocal due to the level of disturbance. Though disappointing that no walls, floors or other tangible features remain of the church building, such thorough destruction is not uncommon.
- 5.2 Though apparently showing deep stratigraphy it may simply be that rather than the remains of the church being deeply buried it might in fact be the opposite and be that the area on which the new church stands was artificially raised. If this is the case there may in fact be undisturbed evidence for the church, albeit at a much deeper level than anticipated. This might also explain the unconvincing geophysical results which would be unable to detect walls so deeply buried. A watching brief carried out in 2000 revealed natural at 1.4m in depth on the north side of the church, further suggesting that the area has been raised (BCAS 2000).
- 5.3 The latest pottery associated with the destruction layers coincides with the period at which it is recorded that the building was removed. Fragments of roof tiles and bricks may be from the church although they could equally represent demolition rubble from other buildings close by and might have been imported with other debris during the landscaping

of the area. The presence of Roman pottery probably indicates settlement close-by. Residual medieval pottery confirms the presence of occupation around the church, and its un-abraded condition suggests that such occupation was not far away.

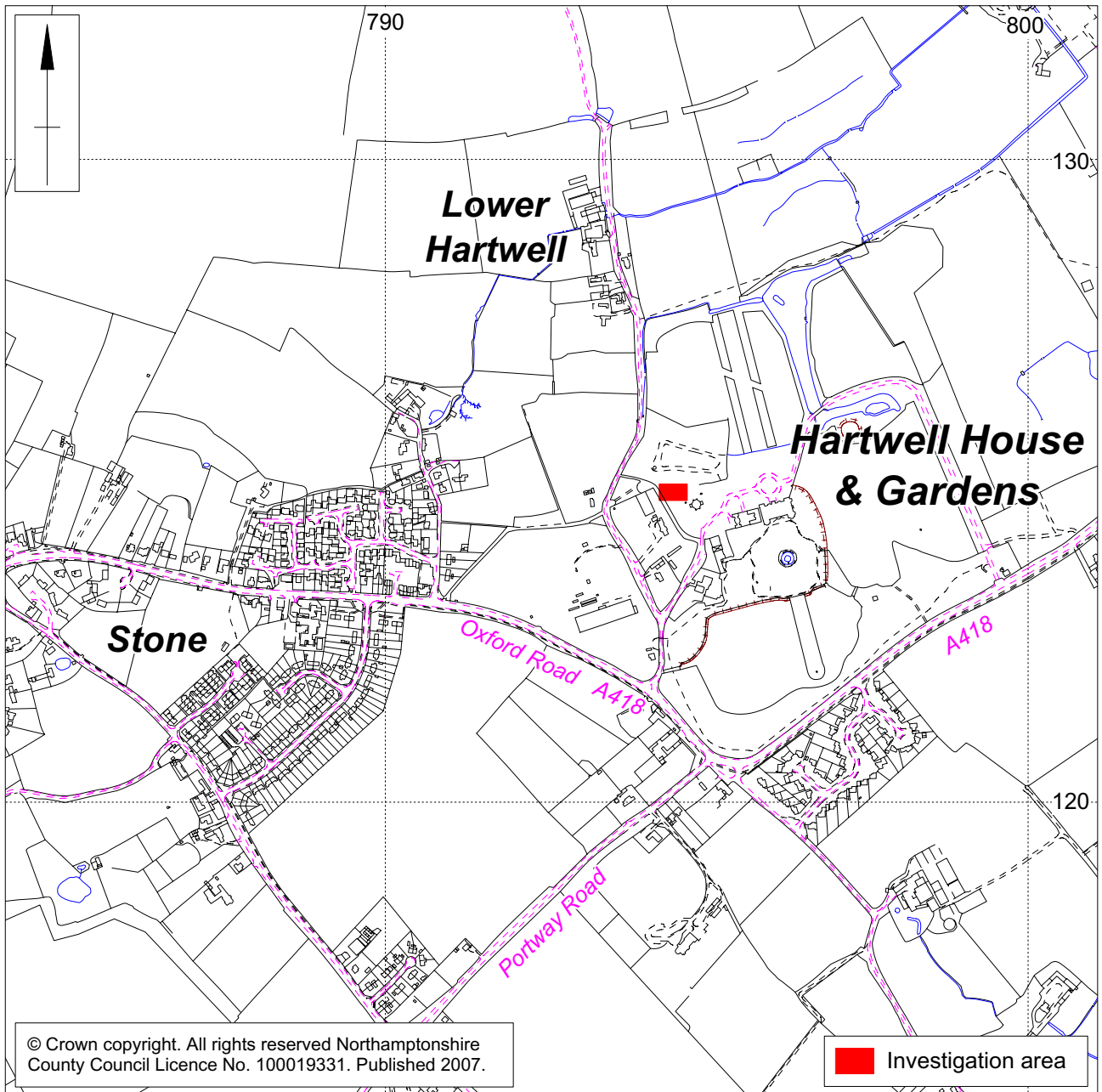
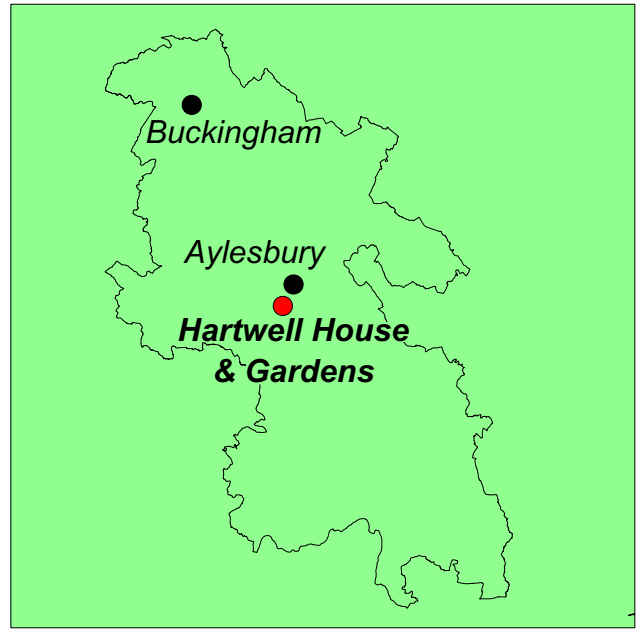
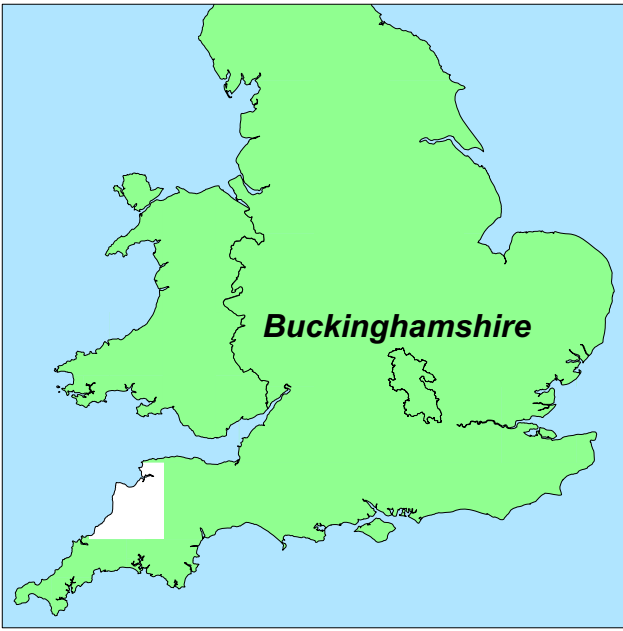
- 5.4 A gilded copper disc, almost certainly originally a button, may have been from the livery of an attendant to the French Court in exile, having as it does the emblem of the Bourbon coat of arms of the period. If this is the case it must date between 1809 and 1814 and presumably is the result of casual loss.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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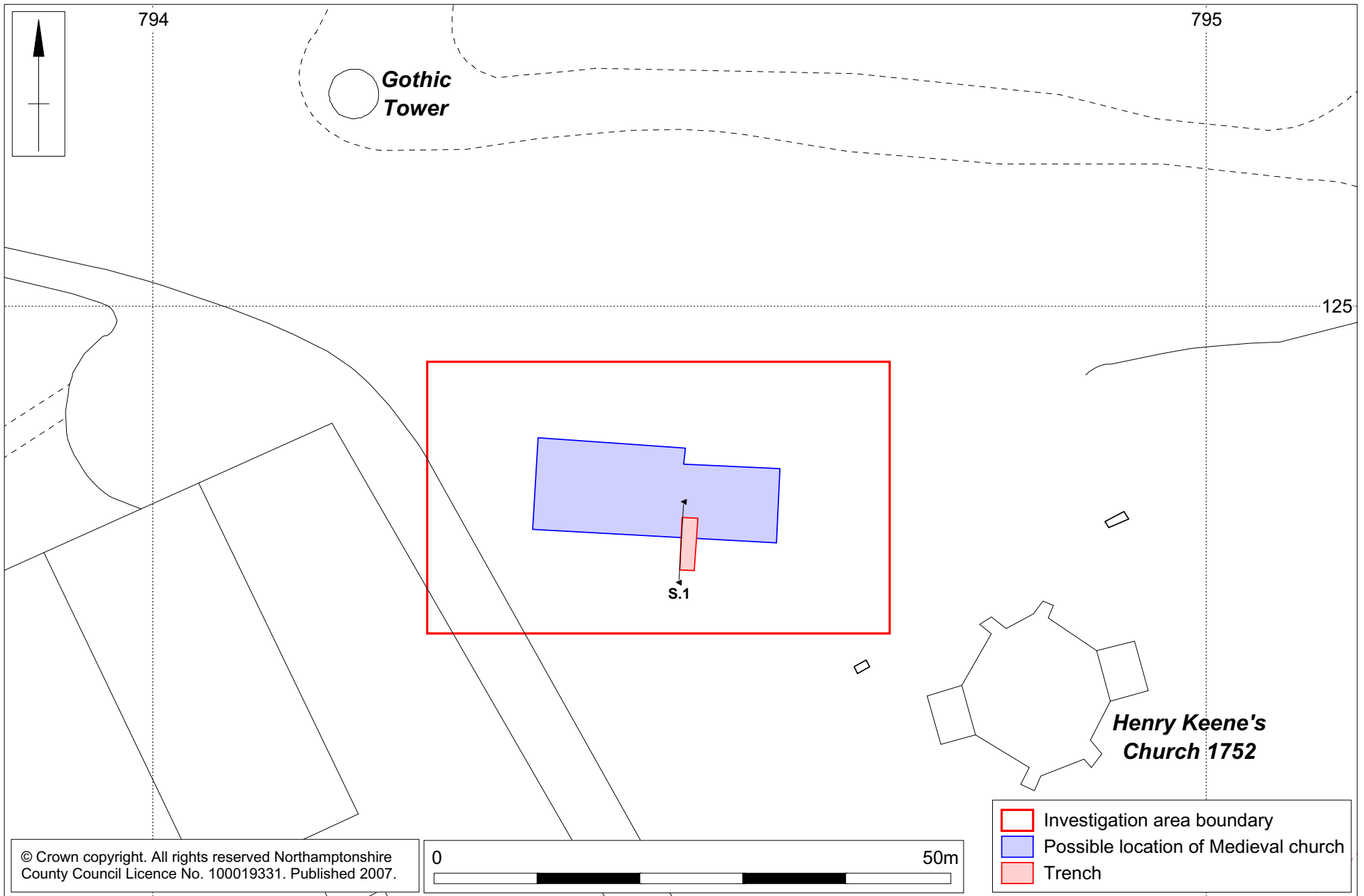
Oswald A 1975 Clay pipes for the Archaeologist, British Archaeological report 14



Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1

Scale 1:500



Trench location

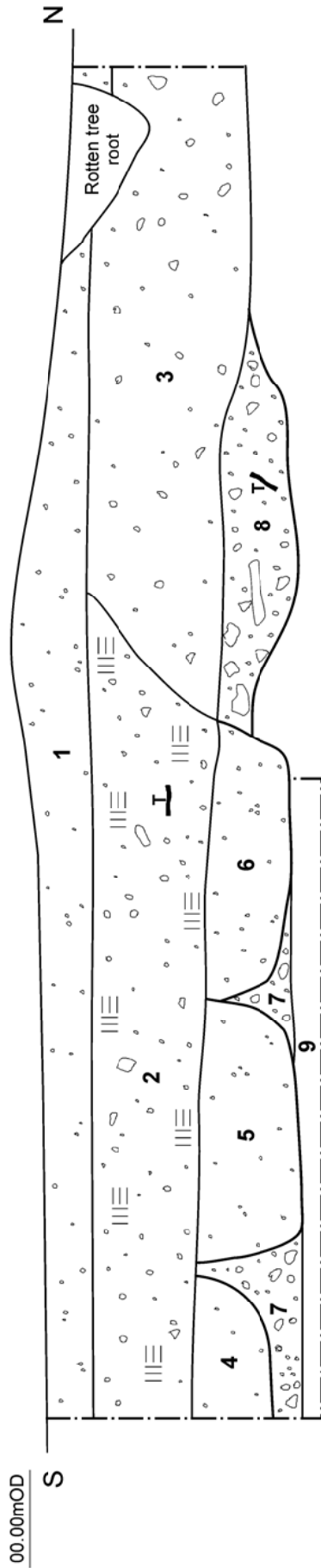
Fig 2

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0 50m

- Investigation area boundary
- Possible location of Medieval church
- Trench

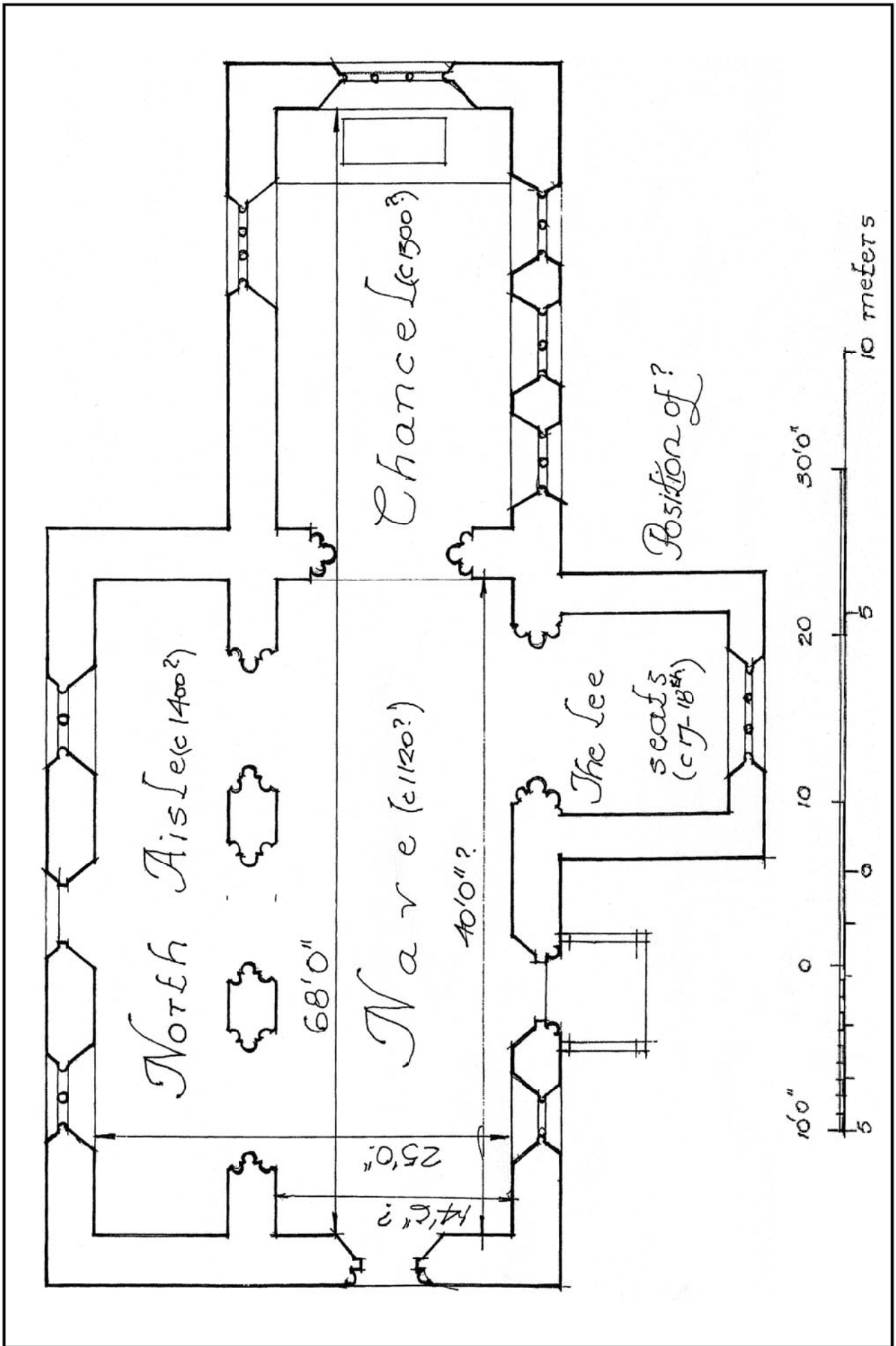
**Section 1**



T Tile  
Clay

0 1m





Conjectural plan of church by Mr. E. Throssell Fig 4





Plate 1: The trench looking north-west.



0 25mm



Plate 2: Gilded copper alloy button with Bourbon emblem and the Bourbon Coat of Arms