

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Pilton, North Devon	National Grid Reference SS 55623 34143	Number:
Subject: Archaeological monitoring and recording during wall repairs at St. Marys Church, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon		Photo attached? YES
Planning Application no: 59197	Recipient museum: Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon	
OASIS ID: southwes1-225304	Museum Accession no: N/A	
Contractor's reference number/code: PSM15	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 10 th -11 th August 2015	
<p>Description of works. Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken by South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) at the request of W. Sanders on behalf of the Diocese of Exeter (the Client) during groundworks associated with the repair of the churchyard walls at St. Marys Church, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon. The monitoring was carried out by P. Webb on 10th and 11th August 2015.</p> <p>St. Marys Church is located within the core of the medieval settlement of Pilton, now a suburb on the northern edge of Barnstaple in North Devon. The settlement sits on a shallow ridge running back from the estuary of the River Taw, bounded on the south-east by the River Yeo and to the north-west by Bradiford Water. The church itself sits on a south-facing slope at a height of approximately 21m AOD. The soils of the area are the well-drained fine loamy soils of Denbigh 2 Association (SSEW 1983) overlying mudstone of the Pilton Mudstone Formation (BGS 2015).</p> <p>Pilton is an early medieval settlement – one of the four original burhs in Devon – and the church sits on the edge of a large oval enclosure and the site of a priory. Excavations carried out in the early 1970s (Miles and Miles 1972) north-east of the church identified several phases of buildings related to the early occupation of Pilton, potentially dating back as far as the 7th century AD. The Benedictine Priory was founded 925-40 (HER MDV806); the present St. Marys Church is Grade I Listed (Listing 1385316) and dates to the 13th century, with 15th and 17th century repairs and alterations. Surrounding the churchyard are its 19th-20th century Grade II Listed stone rubble walls (Listing 1385320) and a number of post-medieval buildings. The former residence of the Prior (Bull House) is located adjacent to the south-west and dates to the 15th century; it is also Grade I Listed (Listing 1385078); Area #2 borders on the garden of Bull House.</p> <p>The groundworks comprised the removal of a damaged/collapsing segment of wall (Area #1) and the hand excavation of an area adjacent to a further damaged/collapsing segment of wall (Area #2) under archaeological supervision. Both sections of walling are located in that part of the churchyard south-west of the nave. The stratigraphy of the site comprised a thin layer of blackish-brown soft-friable clay-silt loam c.0.06m thick overlying accumulated layers and levelling deposits comprised of brown and greyish-brown clayey silts with shillet inclusions up to 2.1m in thickness, overlying natural shillet.</p> <p>Area #1, located in the north-west corner of this part of the churchyard, saw the removal of a stretch of wall c.2.2m long at the corner; this revealed a cross-section through the deposits that had built up behind the wall. These deposits comprised clay with shillet layers (006) to (014) overlying the natural shillet (015). The features identified within this section were [012] and [024], filled by (011) brown friable silt, and (005) grey friable clay-silt. These features were associated with repairs to the wall. The majority of the finds from the site came from the collapsed soils behind this corner.</p> <p>Area #2, located in the south-west corner of this part of the churchyard saw the excavation of an area 4×0.5m across, orientated north-west to south-east against the existing wall. It was excavated to a depth of 0.9m and identified a cut [020] with fills (018) of concreted mortar fragments, and (019) mortar within soft silt-clay, for the repair of the wall. These cut into the upper layers of the ground behind. A single feature was identified at the base of this excavation: linear cut [023], which was 0.7m wide and orientated north-east to south-west. It contained a single fill (022), a friable brown silt with frequent gravel inclusions. This section of wall is slightly set back from the rest, and the base of a wider wall (in brick) was also visible in the base of the trench.</p>		

Finds

The majority of the finds were recovered from unstratified contexts (primarily a result of soil collapse at the removal of the wall) and are dominated by North Devon ceramics of a domestic character dating to the post-medieval period. Later material is sparser and most of the white refined earthenware appears to be from grave furnishings (i.e. flower-pots). The stratified finds show a similar pattern. The contextual evidence from Area #1 indicates a build-up of layers predominantly during the 18th and 19th centuries, though with lower layers potentially dating to the 17th century. Predictably, the material was dominated by North Devon wares, mainly post-medieval gravel-free (49 sherds, 978g) and gravel-tempered (28 sherds, 1435g, inc. heavy Type 3 bowls) pottery. Only 10 sherds (140g) bore a yellow glaze (external or internal) with only one clear sgraffito plate, with a fairly simple design. Imports were represented by three small sherds (6g) of Bristol/Staffordshire yellow slipware.

An amount of human bone was recovered, but also animal bone, emphasising the domestic character of much of the assemblage; the human bone included the top of an adult cranium (possibly male) recovered from next to the wall. A small amount of oyster shell (5 shells, 128g) and mussel shell (2 shells, 12g).

A full list of the finds recovered is held in the site archive. The skeletal material was returned to the church.

Conclusions

The features identified during the monitoring predominantly relate to the repair of the churchyard walls. The finds suggest that the layers retained behind the churchyard walls are predominantly comprised of 18th and 19th century deposits, with 16th-17th century material towards the base.

References

- Miles, H., and Miles, T. 1975: 'Pilton, North Devon: Excavation within a Medieval Village', *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society* 33, 267-295.
- Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983: *Legend for the 1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales (a brief explanation of the constituent soil associations)*.
- British Geological Survey 2014: *Geology of Britain Viewer*.
http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html [accessed 25.08.2015]

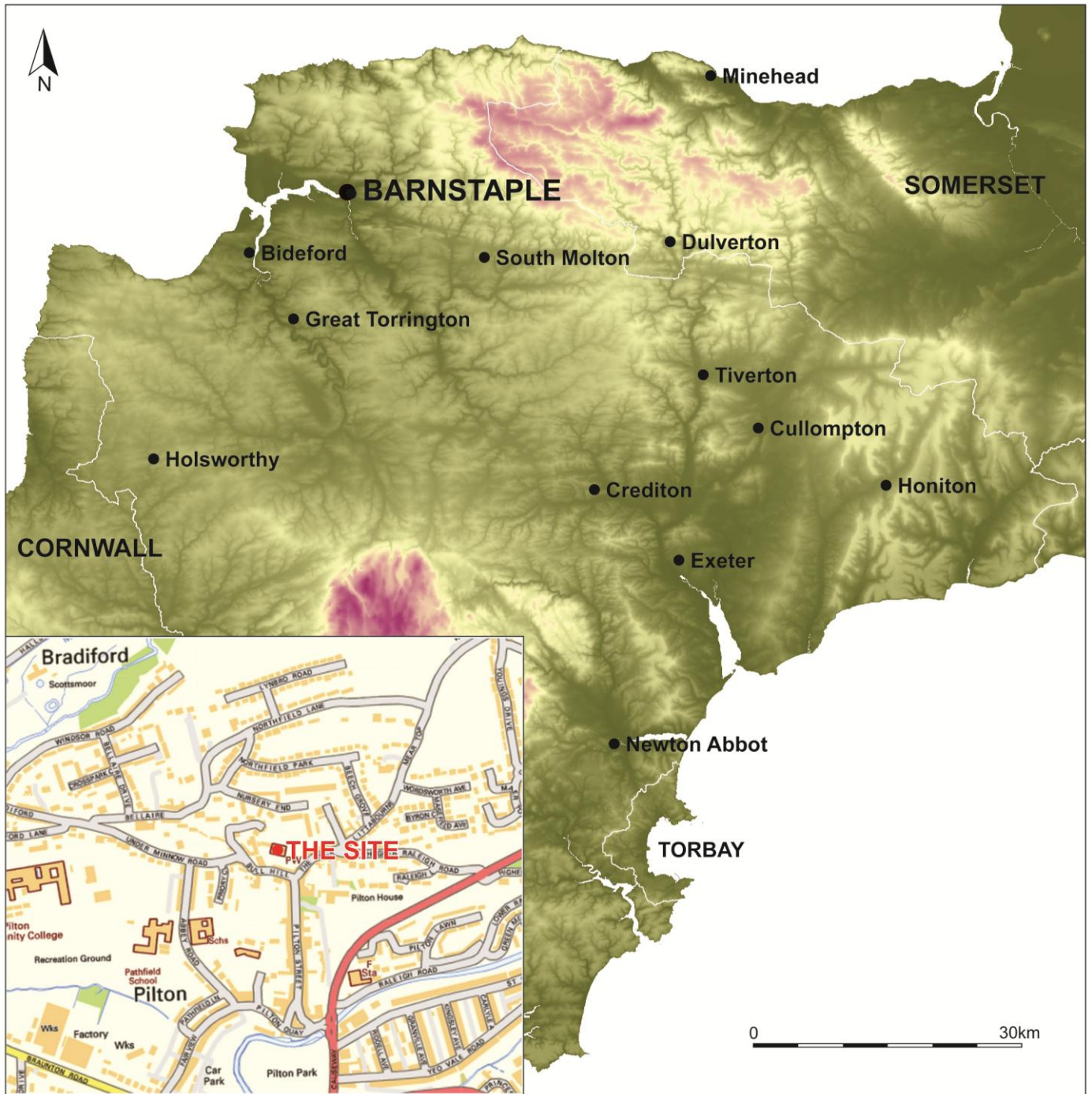


Figure 1: Site location

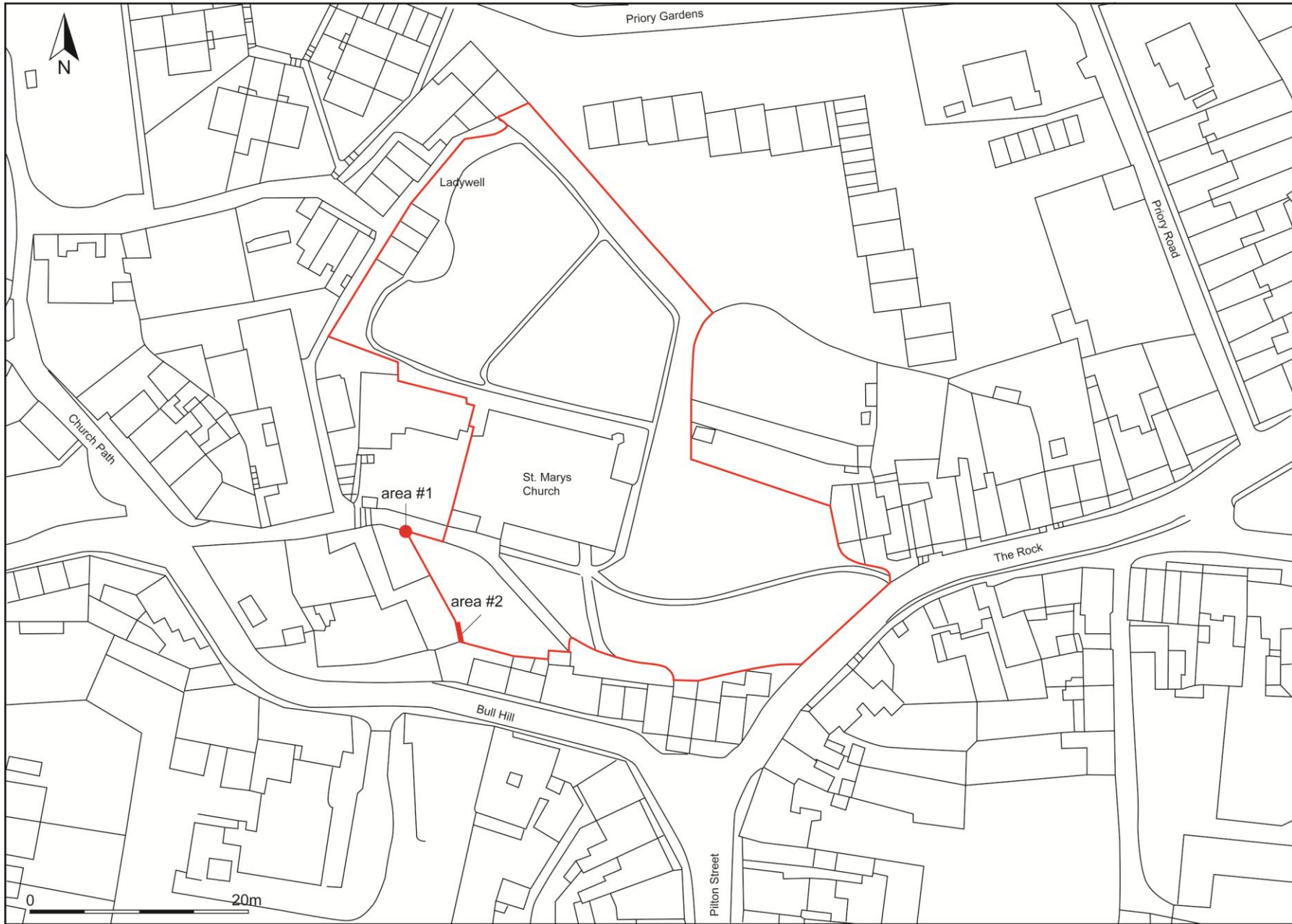


Figure 2: Site plan showing the location of the excavated areas.

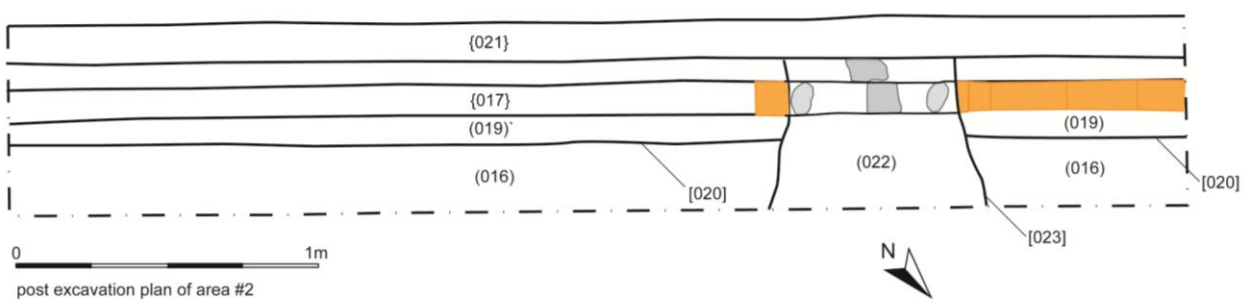
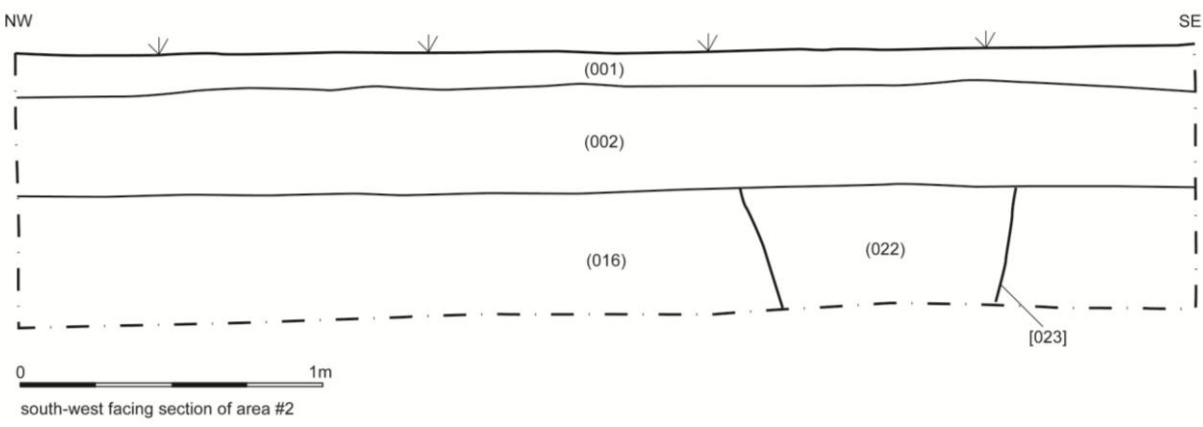
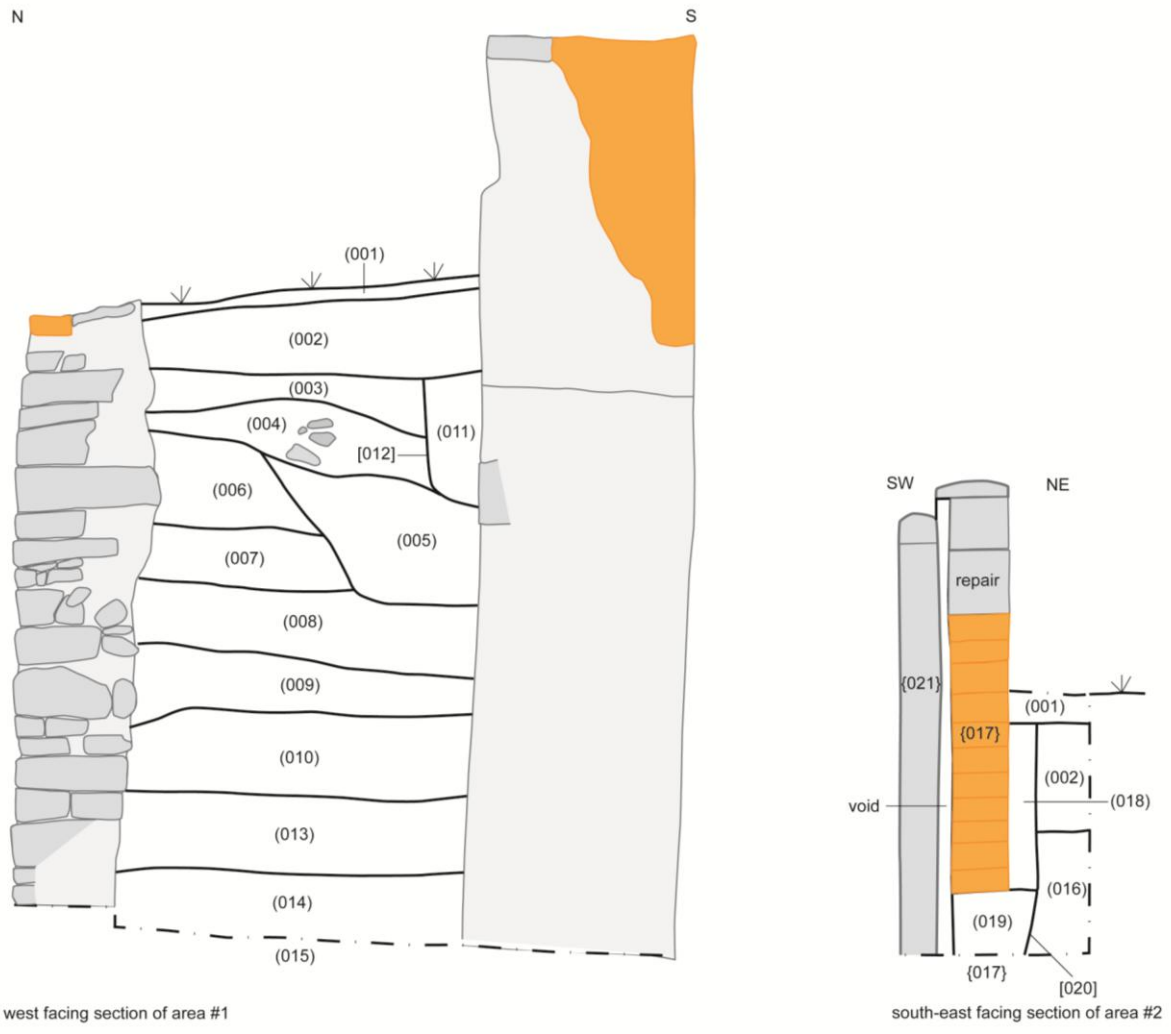


Figure 3: Areas #1 and #2 plans and sections. Areas in orange denote bricks.



Figure 4: West facing section of Area #1; viewed from the east (1m scale).



Figure 5: South-east facing section of Area #2; viewed from the south-east (scale 1m).



Figure 6: Post-excavation plan of Area #2; viewed from the north-east (scale 1m).