

Church of the
Blessed Virgin Mary
Lillingstone Lovell
Buckinghamshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



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Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lillingstone Lovell, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lillingstone Lovell, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 712 404). The work was commissioned by the Parish Parochial Committee (PPC) in advance of underpinning of the east wall of the Sanctuary, excavation of French drains around the body of the church and excavation of a new soakaway. The watching brief revealed the presence of inhumations, both pre-dating and post-dating the 17th-century construction of the Sanctuary and deposits of churchyard soils throughout the area. A recovered fragment of Romano-British pottery suggests the presence of activity pre-dating the construction of the church.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lillingstone Lovell, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 712 404). The work was commissioned by the Parish Parochial Committee in respect of planned underpinning of the east wall of the Sanctuary, excavation of French drains around the body of the church and the excavation of a soakaway pit.

1.1.2 A project brief was agreed with English Heritage by OA detailing how it would meet the requirements for a watching brief.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The village of Lillingstone Lovell is situated 7 km north of the county town of Buckingham (Fig. 1). The church itself is situated on the crest of a ridge bordering a valley which separates the two halves of the village and lies at approximately 100 m above OD. The church is still in use and stands in a churchyard measuring approximately 0.2 hectares. The underlying geology is Blisworth Limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 202).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Lillingstone Lovell formed a detached part of Oxfordshire in 1086, probably as the result of a dependency upon the important royal manor of Kirtlington. Kirtlington lies 13.6 km north of Oxford and 32 km south-west of Lillingstone Lovell, it was the hundredal manor of Ploughly Hundred and the centre of a large multiple estate before 1066. Lillingstone Lovell may have been retained by the king at Kirtlington during the widespread fragmentation of multiple estates in the late Saxon period because of its proximity to areas of woodland and hunting.

1.3.2 Originally Lillingstone Lovell was called Magna (Great) Lillingstone in distinction from Parva (Little) Lillingstone (now Lillingstone Dayrell)

- 1.3.3 By 1086 there were two manors at Lillingstone Lovell, each measuring 2 1/2 hides (120 hectares). One was held by Benzelinus of the king, and the other by Richard Engaine, also of the king.
- 1.3.4 In the early 14th century the parish was acquired through marriage by the Lovell family from the estate of Margret Dansey, the village subsequently taking the name. By the middle of the 14th century the Lovell male line had died out, although the village retained the name.
- 1.3.5 The church mostly dates to *c* AD 1300 though parts of the nave, although a high window in the south wall and some pitched stonework in the area of the porch could suggest earlier origins. The north aisle windows are early 14th century in date, while the extension to the east of the nave forming the Sanctuary dates to around 1660 (Pevsner and Williamson, 580).
- 1.3.6 Previous work on the site (OA, 2005) during trial pits for the underpinning, recorded deep deposits of earlier churchyard soils, but no evidence for inhumations or earlier phases of the church's construction.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the development.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous archaeological presence during those works likely to disturb or impinge upon archaeological deposits.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 3, sections). All excavations and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Underpinning of the east wall

- 3.1.1 This consisted of a 4 m long by 1 m wide trench dug to a maximum depth of 1.2 m, dug against and under the east wall of the sanctuary (Fig. 2). Within the underpinning trench the underlying natural, the weathered top of the Blisworth limestone deposits (12), was encountered 1.5 m below the level of the current churchyard (Fig. 3, sections 1 and 2). This was sealed by a 0.2 m deep layer of disturbed dark grey clay silt (32) containing many fragments of stone and which was a probable layer of earlier grave yard soil.
- 3.1.2 This deposit had been cut by the three deepest grave cuts (19, 24 and 28) containing an adult male aged approximately 40 (16), an adult male (23) and a young adult female (27) and backfilled with fills 18, 22 and 26 respectively (Fig. 3, plan).
- 3.1.3 Cut into the tops of these fills was the foundation trench (21) containing the east wall of the Sanctuary (20), which was constructed c1660. Butting up to the church wall was a 0.7 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (2). This layer contained many limestone and clay roofing tile fragments and is indicative of a heavily disturbed church yard soil horizon. Cut into this layer was a 0.9 m deep by 0.4 m wide grave cut (11) containing the skeleton of an adult aged over 50 and backfilled with a grey-brown clay silt (9). Truncating the northern edge of both 9 and 11 and removing the left side of 10 was a 0.8 m deep by 0.6 m wide grave cut (8) which contained the skeleton of an adult male aged between 30 and 40 and which was backfilled with a grey-brown clay silt (6).
- 3.1.4 Cut into the northern edge of fill 6 was a 0.3 m deep by 0.5m wide grave cut (5). This contained the upper half of an adult male skeleton aged between 30 and 40 and was backfilled with a grey-brown clay silt (3). Approximately 0.7 m north of cut 5 and cut into layer 2 was a 0.6 m deep by 0.6 m wide grave cut (17). This contained an adult male skeleton aged over 50 (13) and was backfilled with a grey-brown clay silt (15).
- 3.1.5 Overlying deposits 6 and 15 was a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown silt loam (1), the present day churchyard topsoil and turf.

Excavations for the French drains and soakaway pit.

- 3.1.6 The existing Victorian brick drainage gullies were removed and a channel was excavated for the French drains alongside the east, north and south faces of the church (Fig. 2). These excavations measured 0.4 m wide with an average depth of 0.5 m and were contained wholly within layer 2.
- 3.1.7 The excavation for the soakaway pit was located immediately to the north-west of the churchyard gate and measured approximately 1 m by 1m by 1.6 m deep (Fig. 2). The base of the pit cut 0.4 m deep into the top of the underlying natural (12). This was overlaid by a 1 m deep layer of disturbed grey-brown clay silt containing limestone and clay roofing tile fragments and is a probable continuation of the earlier churchyard soil (2). Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of grey-brown clay loam, a continuation of the present day churchyard topsoil and turf (1).

3.1.8 No inhumations were encountered during the course of this excavation of the soakaway pit.

3.2 **Finds**

3.2.1 Only two fragments of dating evidence were recovered during the course of the watching brief, both from layer 2, the disturbed churchyard soil. One fragment was a shard of Romano-British ware, possibly a fragment of Severn Valley ware, probably residual in origin, and a shard of early medieval limestone tempered ware, probably relating to the early history of the village.

3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

4.1.1 The watching brief showed that the construction of the 17th-century Sanctuary encroached over areas of the original churchyard already used for burials and that a later phase of burials post-dating this construction respected the new alignment of the building.

4.1.2 No evidence was observed concerning possible earlier phases of church construction. The fragment of Romano-British pottery recovered may relate to occupation of the site prior to the construction of the church but no other evidence for any such activity was observed.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.2 m	-	Modern churchyard topsoil and turf	Brick, tile	C19th /20th
2	Layer	0.7 m	-	Layer of earlier churchyard soil	Tile, pottery	C17th
3	Fill	0.4 m	0.6 m	Backfill of grave 5	-	C18th /19th
4	Skeleton	-	-	Adult male, between 30- 40 in age	-	C18th /19th
5	Cut	0.4 m	0.6 m	Grave cut	-	C18th /19th
6	Fill	0.6 m	0.6 m	Backfill of grave 8	-	C18th /19th
7	Skeleton	-	-	Adult male, between 30 - 40 in age	-	C18th /19th
8	Cut	0.6 m	0.6 m	Grave cut	-	C18th /19th
9	Fill	0.7 m	0.4 m	Backfill of grave 11	-	C18th /19th
10	Skeleton	-	-	Adult male, aged over 50	-	C18th /19th
11	Cut	0.7 m	0.4 m	Grave cut	-	C18th /19th
12	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Top of weathered natural stone	-	-
13	Skeleton	-	-	Adult female, aged over 50	-	C18th /19th
14	Finds reference	-	-	Finds reference for charnel from underpinning pit excavation	-	-
15	Fill	0.4 m	0.6 m	Backfill of grave 17	-	C18th /19th
16	Skeleton	-	-	Adult male, approximately 40 years in age	-	Earlier than C17th
17	Cut	0.4m	0.6 m	Grave cut	-	C18th /19th
18	Fill	0.3 m	0.6 m	Backfill of grave 19	-	Earlier than C17th
19	Cut	0.3 m	0.6 m	Grave cut	-	Earlier than C17th

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
20	Structure	1.2 m	0.9 m	Foundations for east wall of church	-	C17th
21	Cut	1.2 m	0.9 m	Construction cut for foundations	-	C17th
22	Fill	1.1 m	0.26 m	Backfill of grave 24	-	Earlier than C17th
23	Skeleton	-	-	Adult male skeleton	-	Earlier than C17th
24	Cut	1.1 m	0.26 m	Grave cut	-	Earlier than C17th
25	Finds reference	-	-	Finds reference for charnel from underpinning pit excavation	-	-
26	Fill	1.0 m	0.4 m	Backfill of grave 28	-	Earlier than C17th
27	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton of young adult female	-	Earlier than C17th
28	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Grave cut	-	Earlier than C17th
29	Finds reference	-	-	Finds reference for charnel from French drain excavation	-	-
30	Finds reference	-	-	Finds reference for charnel from French drain excavation	-	-
31	Finds reference	-	-	Finds reference for charnel from French drain excavation	-	-
32	Layer	0.2 m	-	Earliest churchyard soil	-	Earlier than C17th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson)

OA, 2005 *Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lillingstone Lovell, Buckinghamshire: Archaeological Watching Brief report*

Pevsner N and Williamson, E 1994 *The Buildings of England, Buckinghamshire*. Penguin

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lillingstone Lovell, Buckinghamshire

Site code: LILOCH 07

Grid reference: SP 712 404

Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of underpinning pits at the base of the east wall of the church, hand excavation of French drains and machine excavation of a new soakaway pit and associated trenching.

Date and duration of project: 19/03/07 to 29/03/07, 9 site visits

Area of site: c400m²

Summary of results: The watching brief recorded the presence of inhumations both pre and post dating the 17th century construction of the Sanctuary. A residual find suggesting Romano-British activity prior to the construction of the church was also recorded.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2007.42

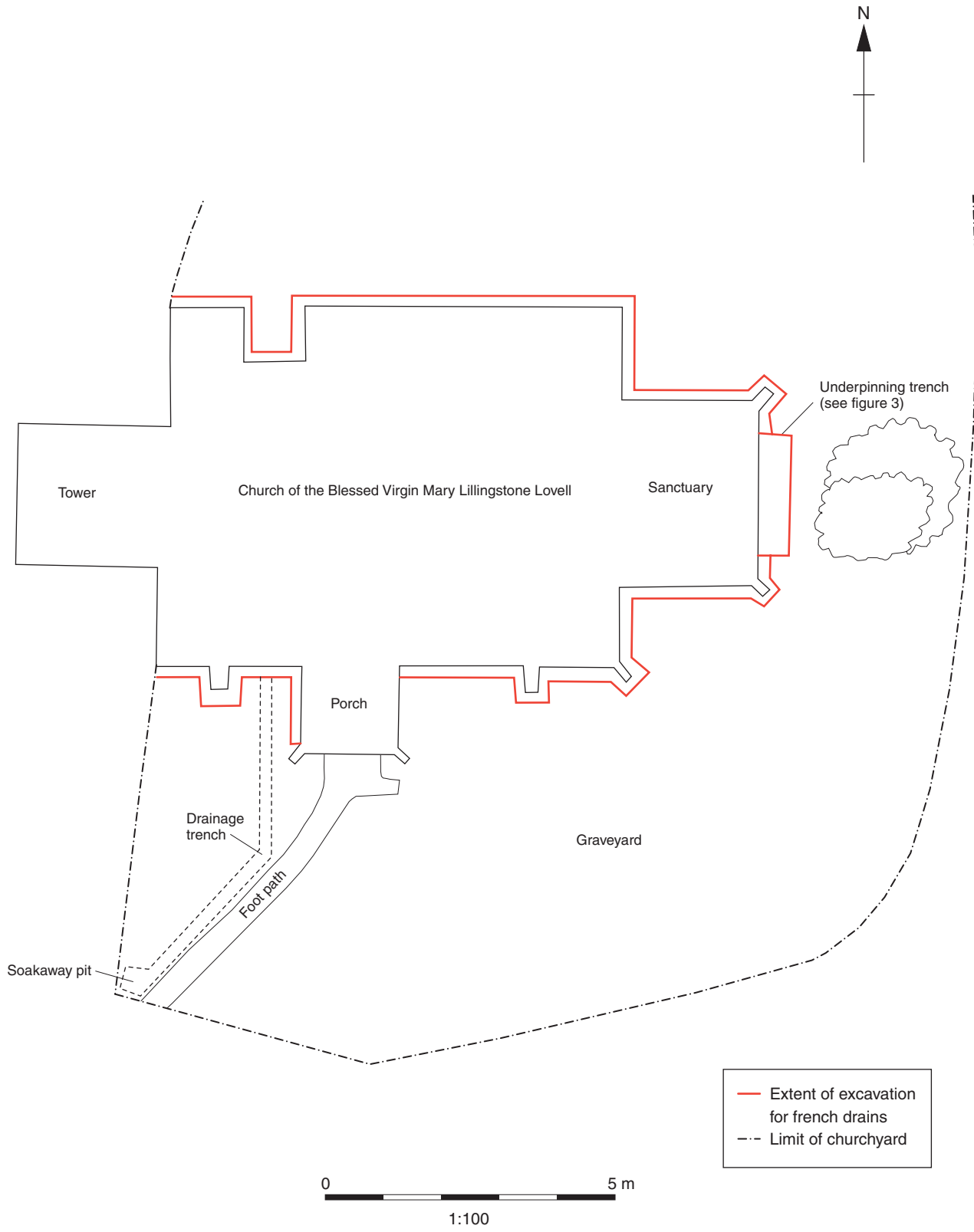


Figure 2: Site plan showing locations of excavations

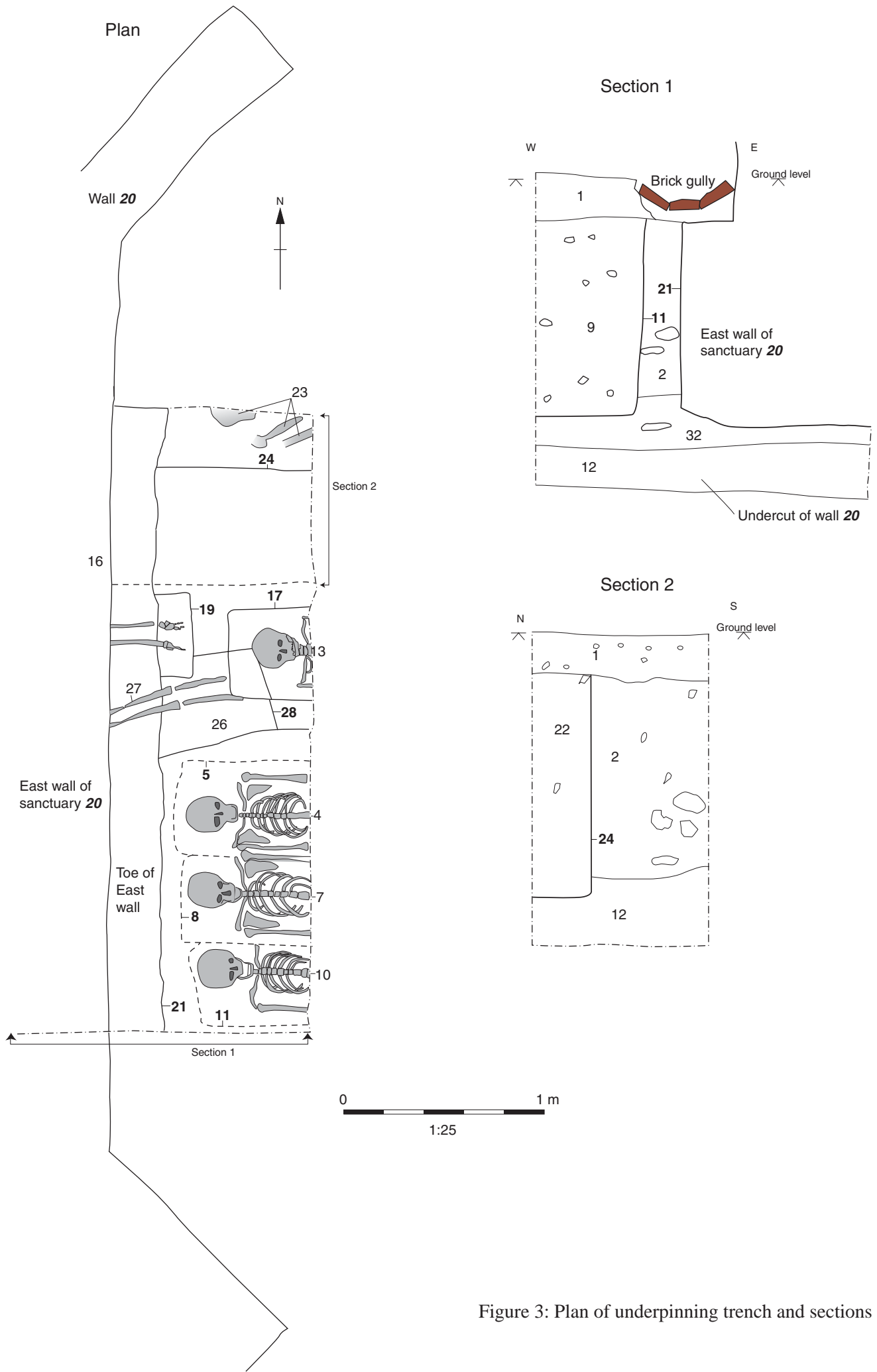


Figure 3: Plan of underpinning trench and sections