

Church of St Melaines, Mullion, Cornwall

(NGR SW 67887 19197)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

Planning reference Cornwall Council PA11/05867

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Mullion PCC

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archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AC archaeology between 23 and 25 April 2013 at the Church of St Melaines, Mullion, Cornwall during groundworks associated with the construction of a new meeting room and associated underground services. Works comprised ground reduction and excavation of foundation trenches for the new meeting room, and excavations for a sewage tank pit, a soakaway pit, and associated services.

During a previous watching brief undertaken in 2003, pottery was recovered dating to the Iron Age, Romano-British and post-Roman periods. Graves of medieval and post-medieval date were also exposed.

Remains exposed by the current works comprised six burials of probable late medieval or post-medieval date. All were likely to be related to the present church, which was constructed in the 15th century. No features, deposits or artefacts pre-dating the church were present.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by AC archaeology during groundworks associated with the construction of a new meeting room and excavations for associated services at the Church of St Melaines, Mullion, Cornwall (SW 67887 19197; Fig. 1). Planning permission for the meeting room was granted by Cornwall Council (planning reference PA11/05867). The archaeological work was requested by the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches, and a brief provided by Cornwall County Historic Environment Planning Advice Officer (HEPAO). The watching brief was commissioned by Mullion PCC.
- 1.2 The church is situated in the centre of Mullion, at approximately 65m aOD, on land sloping gently down to the northwest. The underlying geology comprises Treboe hornblende-Schist (Lizard complex).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The church of St Melaines is a Grade I listed building (National Heritage List no. 1158147) described as having a 15th-century nave, north and south aisles, porch and chancel. The tower was erected in c.1512. The vestry to which the new meeting room has been attached is possibly of mid 19th-century date. The church was restored in 1840 and 1870.
- 2.2 The Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record (C&SHER) contains several entries for the church. Entry 10693.10 includes the following description relating to the early history of the site:

Mullion church may be on a pre-Conquest site. Henderson states that "the farm adjacent to the church is called Tremenehoe, ie 'the sanctuary town', and near by is Lanfrowder. These names indicate a Celtic church here". In fact, the name Lanfrowder may contain the place name element nans, 'valley', rather than lann, 'early Christian enclosure', and the shape and location of the churchyard do not suggest a lann (b7). However, the fact that Mullion church is called "Eglosmeylyon" in early records, may imply the existence of a pre-Norman church on the site (b7).
- 2.3 Entry 169695 records the presence of a possible lantern cross built into the fabric of the west wall of the church tower.

- 2.4 The brief provided by the HEPAO refers to a watching brief undertaken in 2003, which recovered Iron Age, Romano-British and post-Roman pottery. It was suggested that the site had been occupied throughout this period and as late as the 11th century and was possibly the site of a round. Graves uncovered during this work were of medieval and post medieval date and were most probably related to the church.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the work were set out in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2013). They were to:
- establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains
 - determine the extent, condition, nature, character, date and significance of any archaeological remains encountered
 - establish the nature of the activity on the site
 - identify any artefacts relating to the occupation or use of the site
 - undertake palaeo-environmental investigation as appropriate
 - provide further information on the archaeology of the site

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 All groundworks were undertaken using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket, working under constant archaeological supervision. Where archaeological features and deposits were exposed they were cleaned, examined and recorded. Where archaeological features were to be removed by the development they were hand excavated to at least the depth of the anticipated disturbance.
- 4.2 The site was recorded in accordance with the *AC archaeology pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and with reference to AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*.
- 4.3 Where human remains were encountered and could not be left *in situ*, their removal was undertaken following receipt of the appropriate licence from the Ministry of Justice. All human remains were left on site for reburial.

5. RESULTS (Figs 2-3; Plates 1-5)

- 5.1 **Ground reduction and footings excavations for the new meeting room** (Fig. 2; Plate 1)
Topsoil 100, which consisted of dark grey-brown firm silty clay, was partially removed across the footprint of the building. A number of sherds of post-medieval pottery was recovered from topsoil layer 100. The external foundation trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m from the surface. In the northeast corner of this area a subsoil layer (101), consisting of mid brown friable silty clay, was exposed under 100. In the southwest corner of the new building three large slabs of slate (103) were partially exposed. These are likely to be associated with the adjacent grave of Mary Tregrouse (d.1768), and were left *in situ*.
- 5.2 **Sewage Tank Pit** (Fig. 2a; Plates 2-3)
This pit measured 2m x 2m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.65m, at which depth natural was exposed. Two intercutting, east-west aligned, graves (F106 and F109) were exposed, cut into the natural subsoil. Overlying deposits comprised 0.09m of mid brown silty-

clay subsoil (101) overlain by 0.56m of dark grey-brown silty-clay topsoil (100). Both layers contained charnel deposits of bone.

Grave F106

The earlier of two burials, grave F106, was partially exposed, at its western end to a length of 0.56m. It measured 0.25m wide, continued beyond the limit of excavation to the east, and had been truncated by grave F109 to the north. The surviving exposed skeletal remains (104) comprised the articulated upper torso and skull, lain in a prone position, head to the west. Bone was poorly preserved; the arms and lower torso were missing (probably due to decomposition), whilst the pelvis and legs were beyond the limit of excavation. The body was small in stature (probably less than a metre in height) and probably therefore an infant. The skeletal remains were covered by grave fill 105, a mid yellow-brown redeposited natural clay. No finds were recovered.

Grave F109

Grave F109 was exposed to a length of 1.55m, measured up to 0.56m wide, and continued beyond the limit of excavation to the east. The surviving exposed skeletal remains (107) comprised the entire body except the feet (which were beyond the limit of excavation), lain in a prone position, with hands below the legs and head to the west (107). Fragments of undecomposed wood survived around the skeleton and are likely to be remains of a coffin. Bone was poorly preserved. The body measured approximately 1.5m in height. Skeletal remains were covered by grave fill 108, a mid yellow-brown redeposited natural clay. No finds were recovered.

5.3 Soakaway pit (Fig. 2b; Plates 4-6)

This pit measured 2m x 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.65m. Natural subsoil was exposed at a depth of 0.65m. A total of four southeast-northwest aligned graves (F112, F116, F119 and F120) were exposed. Graves F112 and F116 cut the natural subsoil, whilst graves F119 and F120 had truncated 116. Overlying deposits comprised 0.09m of mid brown silty-clay subsoil (101) overlain by 0.56m of dark grey-brown silty-clay topsoil (100). Both layers contained charnel deposits of bone.

Grave F112

Grave 112 was partially exposed to a length of 0.8m and width of 0.8m, and continued beyond the limit of excavation to the east and south. The surviving exposed skeletal remains comprised the articulated upper torso and skull, lain in a prone position, head to the southwest (110). Bone was poorly preserved, and the lower torso, pelvis and legs were beyond the limit of excavation. The body was large in stature and likely to be an adult. Skeletal remains were covered by grave fill 111, a mid yellow-brown redeposited natural clay. No finds were recovered.

Grave F116

Grave 116 contained an apparent double burial. It was exposed to a length of 1.9m, measured 0.35m wide, continued beyond the limit of excavation to the east, and had been substantially truncated by later grave F119. The surviving earlier articulated skeletal remains exposed comprised the partial skull, right shoulder and arm, and partial legs of a probable adult (114). The legs had been truncated by the burial (F120) of an infant whose exposed remains comprised the skull, right torso, arm, hand and femur (113). The torso and pelvis of skeleton 114 had been removed by later grave F119. The left side and legs of skeleton 113 were beyond the limit of excavation. Both were lain in a prone position, head to the northwest. The infant (113) had been positioned at the foot of the grave overlying the feet of 114. Bone was poorly preserved. Skeletal remains were covered by grave fill 105, mid yellow-brown redeposited natural clay. A single copper alloy pin was recovered from the lower torso of skeleton 113.

Grave F119

Grave 119 was partially exposed to a length of 1.25m. It measured 0.5m wide, and continued beyond the limit of excavation to the west. The surviving exposed skeletal remains comprised the articulated legs and feet, lain in a prone position, head to the northwest (117). Bone was poorly preserved. The body appeared large in stature and likely to be an adult. Skeletal remains were covered by grave fill 118, a mid yellow-brown redeposited natural clay. No finds were recovered.

6. THE FINDS *by Kerry Kerr-Peterson*

6.1 Introduction

All finds recovered on site during the watching brief were retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They were then quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage was scanned to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. This is discussed below. The watching brief produced small amounts of metalwork, post-medieval pottery, ceramic building material, glass, animal bone and fired clay. Most of the finds were from the topsoil. The finds are summarised by context in the table below.

| Context | Context description | Copper alloy | | Lead | | Fired clay | | Glass | | CBM | | Post-medieval pottery | | Animal bone | |
|---------|---------------------|--------------|-----|------|----|------------|----|-------|----|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-------------|-----|
| | | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt |
| 100 | Topsoil | | | 1 | 20 | 2 | 14 | 1 | 17 | 5 | 358 | 12 | 172 | 17 | 130 |
| 113 | Skeleton | 1 | 0.1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 20 | 2 | 14 | 1 | 17 | 5 | 358 | 12 | 172 | 17 | 130 |

Table 1. Summary of finds by context. Weights are in grams.

6.2 Metalwork

The metalwork includes a flat piece of lead (20g), 115mm in length and pointed at both ends. This appears to be an off-cut from a piece of lead sheet. It has no clear purpose. A small copper alloy pin (0.1g), possibly used as a shroud pin, was found in association with skeleton 113. This is fragmentary and in a poor state of preservation. It has a small globular head and a drawn shaft. The pin is likely to be later medieval or early post-medieval in date.

6.3 Fired clay

A total of two undiagnostic pieces of fired clay (14g) were recovered from the topsoil.

6.4 Glass

A very small square glass bottle (17g) was recovered from the topsoil. This has a short cylindrical neck and probably dates from the 19th century.

6.5 Ceramic building material (CBM)

A total of five pieces of ceramic building material (358g) was recovered from topsoil, three of which are unglazed granite-derived pan-style roof tiles which are likely to be post-medieval in date. The assemblage also contains two pieces of imported green-glazed floor tile. These have a pale fabric with a mid-green glaze and were probably manufactured in the Rouen region of Normandy during the early 16th century.

6.6 Post-medieval pottery

In total, 12 sherds of post-medieval pottery (172g) were recovered, all from the topsoil. These consist of mostly granite-derived lead-glazed earthenwares, probably manufactured in the Lostwithiel region, and dating from the 18th or 19th centuries. There are also sherds of South Somerset-type courseware, Staffordshire grey stoneware and yellow earthenware, all of a similar date.

6.7 Animal bone

A total of 17 fragmentary pieces of animal bone (130g) were recovered from topsoil, including two cattle teeth.

7. COMMENTS

7.1 No archaeological features or deposits were exposed or artefacts recovered that pre-dated the existing church.

7.2 A total of six burials within five graves were exposed; three were single adult inhumations, one was an infant, and one was the double burial of an adult with a later burial of an infant. All were aligned broadly east-west or southeast-northwest with the head at the west end, typical of most Christian burials. Bone preservation was poor in all cases. All had been cut shallowly into the natural subsoil. Grave F109 contained fragments of a possible coffin. The survival of these fragments did not appear to be the result of waterlogged (or other) organic preservation and is likely to be an indication that the grave is relatively recent (i.e. post-medieval). A drawn copper alloy pin recovered from skeleton 113 in grave F116 is possibly a shroud pin and dates this burial as later medieval or early post-medieval period.

7.3 It is therefore likely that all the exposed burials are, at the earliest, late medieval and associated with the present church rather than earlier activity.

7.4 Burials were exposed only where they cut the natural subsoil. However, the overlying deposits (100 and 101) were effectively a mixed 'burial soil' containing frequent charnel deposits and it is likely that graves were cut from higher up in this material but were not detected during the machine excavation of the pits.

7.5 The excavations for the new meeting room were not deep enough to expose burials present at the level of natural subsoil, and the only feature was a group of laid slates that are probably associated with an adjacent 18th-century tomb.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

8.1 The finds, paper and digital archive are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ pending the a decision by the Royal Cornwall Museum on the future acquisition of archaeological archives.

8.2 The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 184854.

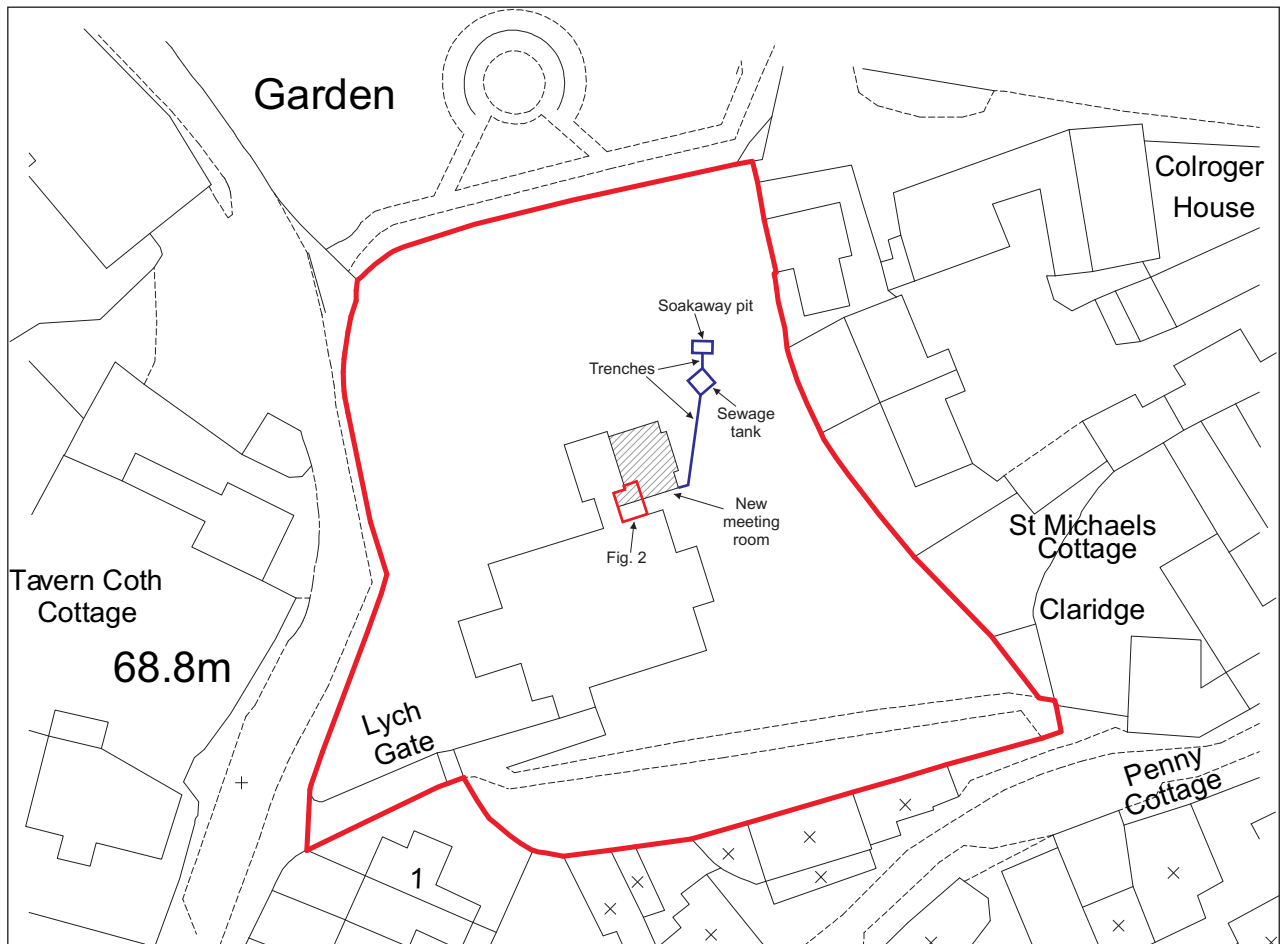
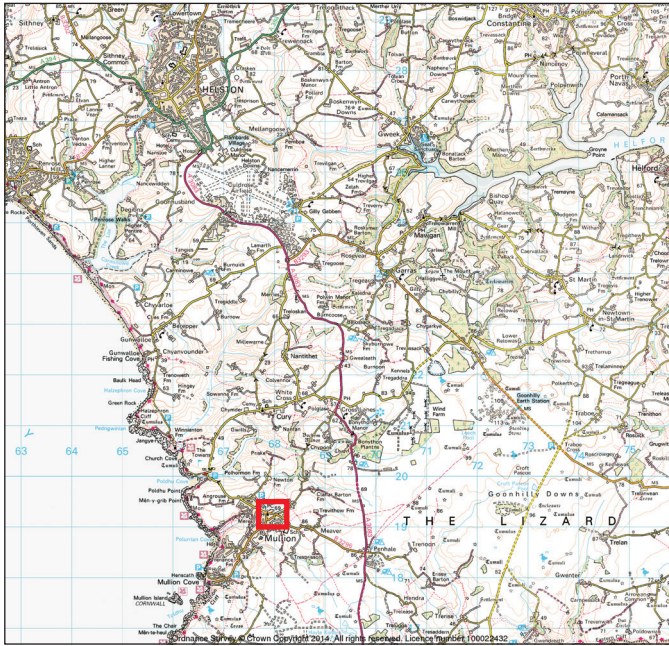
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 9.1** The watching brief was commissioned by Mullion PCC, and managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was undertaken by Chris Caine and the illustrations for this report prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

10. REFERENCES

Passmore, A., 2013, *Church of St Melaines, Mullion, Cornwall, (SW 67887 19197), Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological watching brief, Cornwall Council Planning Reference PA11/05867*, AC archaeology document no. ACD683/1/0

Markham, P., 2013, *Brief for Archaeological Recording, Mullion Parish Church (St Melaines), Churchtown, Mullion, Helston TR12 7HN*



0 25m
Scale 1:750@A4

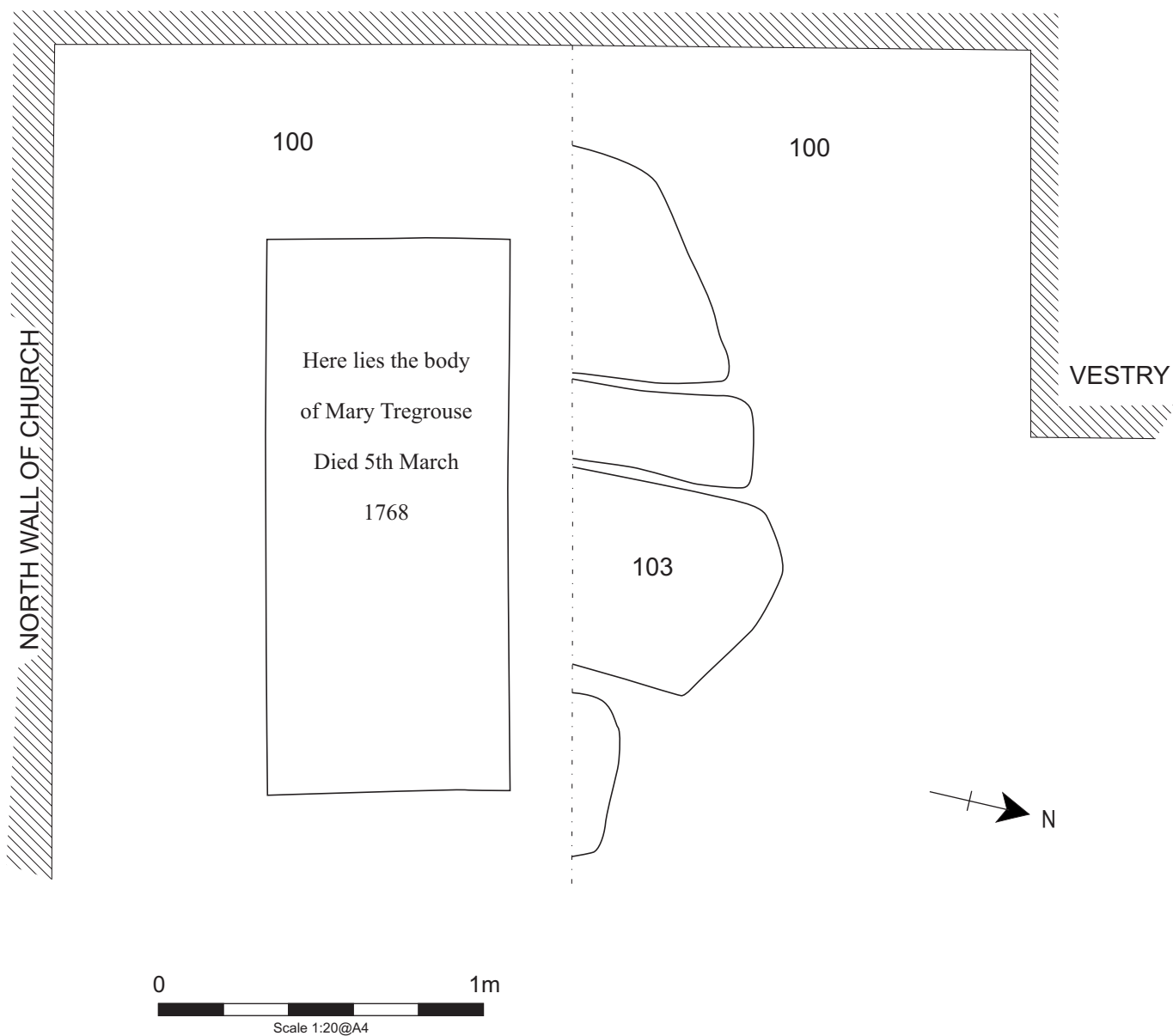
PROJECT

Church of St Melaines, Mullion, Cornwall

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site

WALL OF CORRIDOR



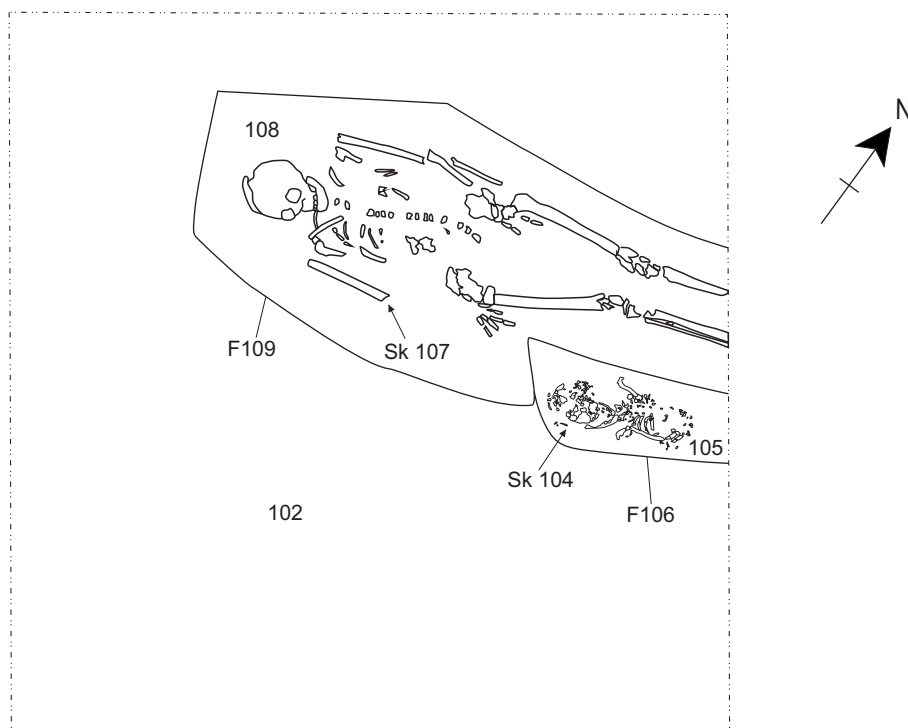
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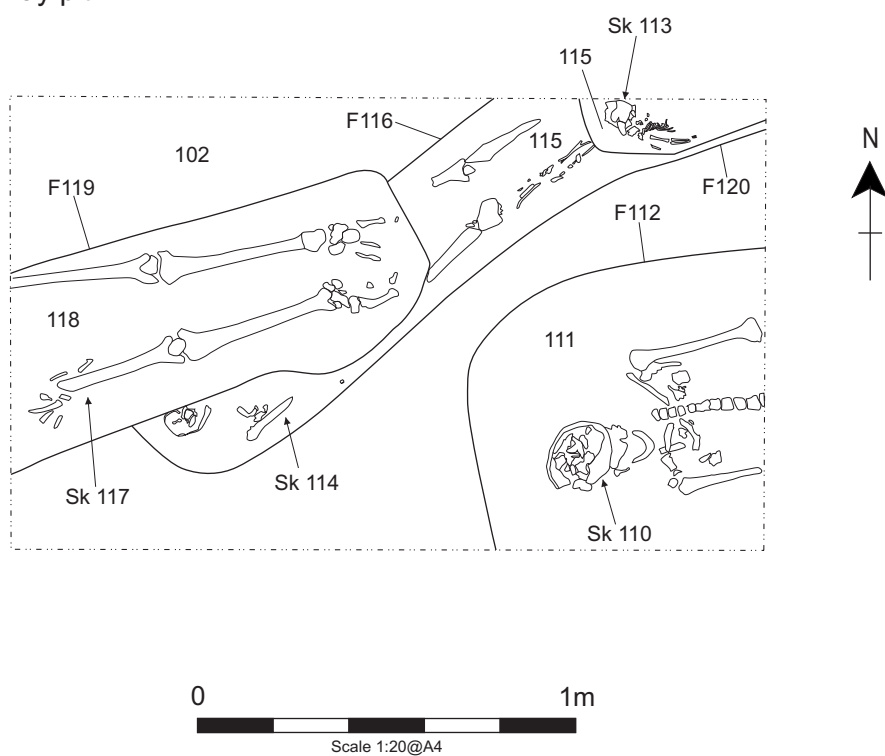
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Fig. 2: Plan of slates 103

a) Sewage tank pit



b) Soakaway pit



PROJECT

Church of St Melaines, Mullion, Cornwall

TITLE

Fig. 3: Plans of sewage tank
and soakaway pits



Plate 1: Slate slabs 103,
viewed from the north, with
the tomb beyond. 1m scale.



Plate 2: Grave F106,
viewed from the east.
0.50m scale.



Plate 3: Grave F109,
viewed from the southeast.
1m scale.



Plate 4: Grave F112,
viewed from the south.
1m scale.



Plate 5: Grave F119,
viewed from the southeast.
1m scale.



Plate 6: Grave F120,
viewed from the south.

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