

# LAND AT THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, CHARD STREET, AXMINSTER, DEVON

Centred on NGR SY 29873 98633

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief

East Devon District Council Planning Reference  
14/2550/FUL (Condition 6)

---

Prepared by:  
Paul Rainbird

On behalf of:  
Skinner Construction Ltd

Report No: ACD1183/2/0

Date: November 2015



AC archaeology

---

# LAND AT THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, CHARD STREET, AXMINSTER, DEVON

## Centred on NGR SY 29873 98633

Results of an archaeological watching brief

East Devon District Council Planning ref. 14/2550/FUL (condition 6)

---

### CONTENTS

	<u>Page no.</u>
<i>Summary</i>	
1. Introduction	1
2. Archaeological and historical background	1
3. Aims	2
4. Methodology	2
5. Results – headstone survey	2
6. Results – watching brief	4
7. Discussion	5
8. Conclusions	6
9. Archive and OASIS	6
10. Acknowledgements	6
11. References	6

### List of figures

- Fig. 1: Location of site  
Fig. 2: Headstone survey plan  
Fig. 3: Plans and sections of trench

### List of plates

- Plate 1: General view of graveyard and area of wall collapse, looking east  
Plate 2: General view of southeast boundary wall, prior to works, looking northeast  
Plate 3: View of remaining boundary wall prior to removal, looking north  
Plate 4: Repair to vaulted tomb S003, looking west  
Plate 5: View of excavated trench, looking north  
Plate 6: View of excavated trench, looking south

**Appendix 1:** Tabulated headstone descriptions

## Summary

*Archaeological monitoring and recording carried out during groundworks associated with the re-building of a revetment boundary wall on land at the United Reformed Church, Chard Street, Axminster, Devon (centred on SY 29873 98633) was undertaken by AC archaeology during July and August 2015. Works comprised the re-building and reinforcement the southeast boundary wall of the churchyard.*

*A record was made of headstones that were to be displaced allowing for their re-setting. The archaeological monitoring of the excavated foundation trench for the new section of wall revealed post-medieval activity only. This comprised a group of graves dating from the 18th or 19th centuries. The burials within these graves were not disturbed and no human remains were exposed or removed from the site.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1; Plates 1-2)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of archaeological monitoring and recording carried out during groundworks associated with the re-building of a collapsed section of the stone revetment wall forming the southeastern boundary to the churchyard of the United Reformed Church, Chard Street, Axminster, Devon (centred on SY 29873 98633). The work was required as condition 6 of planning consent granted by East Devon District Council (ref. 14/2550/FUL), following consultation with the Devon Council Historic Environment Team (hereafter DCCHET).
- 1.2 The archaeological works were commissioned by Skinner Construction Ltd and carried out by AC archaeology between the 21st July and 4th August 2015.
- 1.3 The United Reformed Church occupies a plot of land fronting Chard Street, to the north of the town centre. Bounding the site to the east is the Axe Valley Community College, with which it shares the retaining boundary wall that was subject to the archaeological work. Terraced into the gradient, the level church plot lies lower than the college site and comprises a grass-covered graveyard, church and Sunday school. Along the line of the stone boundary wall were a number of gravestones, of which some had been partially displaced by collapsed or subsided masonry. The site lies at 47m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) and the underlying solid geology comprises mudstone of the Anchor Formation, under superficial sand and gravel river terrace deposits (British Geological Society Online Viewer 2015).

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site had been the subject of a previous Heritage Statement (Salvatore 2015). This set out the history of the site as originating in the late 17th century when a purpose-built meeting house was first constructed. The current church and landscaping work to the grounds was completed in 1828, with the site of the original church then re-used for the current Sunday school building following a fire in 1875. The 1840 Axminster parish tithe map depicts the boundary wall as present at this date.
- 2.2 The United Reformed Church is a non-conformist Christian protestant denomination established by the bringing together the English Presbyterians, Church of Christ and English, Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists in 1972; Axminster had been English Congregationalist. Non-conformist denominations were first established during the 18th century. The Axminster church was strongly linked with the commercial sector of the town and Thomas Whitty (1713-1792), the founder of Axminster Carpet Factory, was baptised on the site (then known as the Independent Chapel) and is buried in the graveyard (Oxford 2015; Salvatore 2015).

**2.3** The boundary wall marks the line of the Axminster Conservation Area as designated by East Devon District Council and the United Reformed Church sits within the conservation area. The Church is a Grade II Listed Building and the graveyard forms part of the curtilage of the listed building (National Heritage List for England no. 1098641).

### **3. AIMS**

**3.1** The aim of the archaeological monitoring and recording was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the scheme. This is with particular reference for the potential for post-medieval to early 20th century human remains to be exposed by the work.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** Prior to commencement, the gravestones positioned adjacent to the boundary wall were catalogued, photographed and their inscriptions transcribed. This information was added to an existing survey drawing of the site to aid the re-positioning of any displaced gravestones following the work (see Fig. 2).

**4.2** All topsoil stripping and trenching was carried out using a tracked 360° machine fitted with a toothless bucket. The groundwork excavations were directly supervised by the attending archaeologist. Following the initial overburden removal the area was cleaned by hand where necessary to clearly identify grave outlines and evidence for graveyard furniture.

**4.3** Where possible all features and deposits exposed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012). Detailed sections and plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate.

### **5. RESULTS – HEADSTONE SURVEY (Fig. 2; Appendix 1)**

**5.1** The graveyard, located to the north and east of the Sunday School building and east of the Church, is an open grassed area with some ornamental shrubs and trees (see Plate 1). It contains only a small number of headstones and a general lack of grave furniture. The headstones that are present form three groups: Group 1 consisted of 11 headstones approximately aligned with the southeast boundary wall of the graveyard and facing northwest (these are numbers 1 to 11); Group 2 a pair in the northeast corner of the graveyard (these are numbers 12 and 13) that face southwest; and Group 3, comprising three headstones (including that of Thomas Whitty, dated 1792) facing northwest along with a northwest-southeast aligned chest tomb. Only groups 1 and 2 were directly affected by the conservation works and are described in detail below.

#### **5.2 Group 1**

##### Headstone 1

This headstone is a plain bed-head shape (see below). The primary interment is Rev'd James Small followed by Martha, William Sarah, Eleanor and Amelia, although it is unlikely that all of these would have been placed in the same grave plot. The latter was interred in June 1812.

### Headstone 2

This headstone is plain with triangular pediment head. The primary interment is Abraham Orchard, possibly interred in 1852, but this was difficult to discern. A secondary interment is of Mary dated 1857.

### Headstone 3

This headstone is a round headed slab with a simple inset grooved border line. No inscription was discernible.

### Headstone 4

This headstone is a short simple round headed slab. A simple inscribed 'S C' with a date, possibly 1830, beneath.

### Headstone 5

This headstone is short, but had a broken head with the inscription 'L W' visible.

### Headstone 6

This headstone is short and appears to have an asymmetrical head with a wave-like shape. It was inscribed 'N D'.

### Headstone 7

This is a tall headstone in bed-head style with an elaborately carved head consisting of an oval panel containing a winged soul above crossed palm foliage. The primary interment is marked James, possibly interred in 1826, but this was difficult to discern. A secondary interment is of James Wills, 1860, and a third his wife Sarah, 1879.

### Headstone 8

This is a tall headstone is plain with a pointed head. The inscription for the primary interment is not possible to discern. Towards the base is inscribed Susanna with the possible date of 1819.

### Headstone 9

This is a tall headstone in bed-head style with an elaborately carved head profile and head are consisting of a pair of scrolls with flower heads and drooping flowers. The outside base of the scrolls sit on shells and on top of the scrolls there is linen fold decoration. The whole of the decoration is topped by a small plain shield, placed centrally, with concave sides and triangular base and head. The primary interment is of Mary Ann Deane, dated 1859, who is noted as wife of Joseph Deane, MP, who is the subject of the secondary interment dated 1886.

### Headstone 10

This is a tall elaborate headstone in gothic style, with an arched shape on a carved plinth with thick border creating an arched space in the form of a window with trefoil head. The space between the border and 'window' is decorated with foliage. The inscription is placed within the 'window' and shows that the primary interment is Sarah Deane, dated 1878 and a secondary interment of Elizabeth Deane, dated 1898.

### Headstone 11

This headstone is almost exactly the same style as Headstone 10. The primary interment is John Bowdidge, date illegible and a secondary interment of Elizabeth Buckhole Bowdidge, dated 1902.

### 5.3 Group 2

#### Headstone 12

This tall headstone is plain with a pointed head and boundary marked by an indented line. The inscription shows that the interment is Mary Eliza daughter of Tho' Baylis and Eliz. Edwards, dated 1841.

#### Headstone 13

This is a short headstone, although it was leaning forwards at the time of recording. It is in bed-head style with an elaborately carved head profile with an inset hemispherical panel containing oak leaves. The inscription is to Thomas Baylis Edwards and dated 1881.

## 6. RESULTS – WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 3; Plates 3-6)

6.1 The groundworks comprised the excavation of a trench measuring approximately 13m long by 1.8m wide alongside the collapsed section of the southeast boundary wall. This was machine-dug to a depth of between 0.85m at its south extent to a depth of 1.1m at the northern extent where the ground rises. A further 'toe' trench measuring 0.3m wide and 0.4m deep was excavated along the western edge of the main trench.

6.2 The remaining lower courses and associated below-ground footings for the existing retaining wall (context 102) measured 0.8m deep and was made up predominantly sandstone blocks and angular pieces, with occasional flint nodules and bonded with lime mortar, and a sandy mortar bonding. No archaeological deposits were revealed below wall 102, with only a previous concrete retaining wall exposed to its rear.

Natural subsoil (105), which comprised a yellowish brown sandy clay and gravels, was present at a depth of 0.74m beneath existing levels. It was overlain by a buried post-medieval topsoil (113), which was composed of a dark grey clayey-loam containing occasional charcoal flecks and flint gravels. This was overlain by a 0.35m thick made ground deposit (106) comprised of mixed re-deposited natural subsoil, topsoil with mortar and stone rubble, with this, in turn, overlain by topsoil (101).

A total of eight probable 18th to 19th century graves (F107, F108, F109, F115, F117 and F123) and two grave structures (103 and 118) were exposed, which each cut through buried topsoil 113.

### 6.2 Grave cuts

The graves (F107-109, F115, F117 and F119) were all back-filled with a mixed redeposited natural subsoil and topsoil. They were hand-excavated within the 'toe' trench to the maximum development formation level of 1.42m below existing levels. No skeletal or associated remains were revealed or disturbed in any of the graves.

### 6.3 Structures

The remaining two graves (103 and 118) were comprised of vault structures.

#### Structure 103

Structure 103 comprised a brick barrel vaulted tomb, revealed at approximately 0.4m below the existing ground surface and was set within grave cut F121. This was then backfilled with mixed redeposited natural subsoil and topsoil (122). The east end of this structure was disturbed, allowing a brief opportunity to view inside, prior to its repair (Plate 4). The interior was coffin shaped and approximately 2m deep. Two skulls were visible, collapsed one on the other at the far, northwest end of the vault. Other unidentified post-cranial bones were also visible in relation to the skulls and indicated that the bodies had been in supine positions. The skeletal remains

appeared to be positioned on some type of metal frame, somewhat reminiscent of a simple bedstead. Square holes, two each side, in the walls of the vault probably indicated the position of beams which held a secondary interment in the vault which had subsequently rotted and allowed the superimposition of the secondary skeleton on to the primary one below. Cement bonding the sides of the vault had been carefully pointed, but that forming the roof was rough and had set hanging indicating that the final interment had been made through the roof which had been re-built without access to the interior; no evidence for a door was observed so the primary burial was presumably also made in this way.

#### Structure 118

Structure 118 was partly revealed within the 'toe' trench at a depth of 1.1m below the ground surface. This structure was set within grave cut F120 and was also brick lined, but unlike tomb 103 was not vaulted, but capped with limestone lintels. It was backfilled with mixed redeposited natural subsoil and topsoil (119).

## **7. DISCUSSION**

- 7.1** The earliest date for burial in the graveyard is 1792 and the most recent 1902. The headstone recording indicated that the majority of interments took place in the 19th century. The majority of the headstones were plain or with simple design elements. They all reflect styles (geometric, bed-head or gothic) and, where present, symbols common in the 19th century. The metaphor of sleep for death was particularly popular for funerary monuments throughout the 19th century and continued into the 20th century (Tarlow 1999). Headstones 1, 7, 9 and 13 are all in bed-head style with Headstone 9 including the inscription 'fell asleep'. Headstones 10 and 11, which appear to have been chosen from the same catalogue, are in the gothic style that became popular in the late 19th century.
- 7.2** The archaeological monitoring of the excavated foundation trench for the new section of wall revealed post-medieval activity only. This comprised a group of graves and vaults dating from the 18th or 19th centuries. The grave cuts and the vaults all match the orientation of the Church which is northwest to southeast. This appears to be an idiosyncratic response to the orientation of the plot, which appears to be set by the landscaping of the terrace creating the northeast to southwest line of the boundary wall. No evidence for any archaeological activity was revealed after the removal of the remaining section of collapsed wall. The graves appear to have been positioned at regular intervals and with the lack of bone in overlying deposits indicating that the graves in this area had not been disturbed earlier burials, or indeed by later burials, other than purposeful secondary or tertiary interments in the same grave cut.
- 7.3** The presence for two grave structures indicates a variety of mortuary practices. Structure 118 with the limestone slab capping is in close proximity to the headstone of Thomas Whitty and there has to be a possibility that this tomb relates to him. Structure 103 would have been marked by the diminutive Headstone 4 at its southeast end, which appears incongruous in relation to a vaulted tomb of this type; it would also, as all of them would be in Group 1, be located at the foot rather than head end of the grave. These factors may be an indication that the headstones have been rearranged somewhat, which is certainly further indicated by the southwest-facing headstones 12 and 13 forming Group 2. Given these findings it would be unreliable to try further to link graves with headstones.
- 7.4** Where the grave structures were revealed they were covered with slates and concrete lintels by the building contractor, prior to the pouring of concrete allowing preservation of all features *in situ* and no requirement to disturb or remove skeletal remains.
- 7.5** It was clear after the removal of the remaining section of collapsed boundary wall that this had in itself been a recent build. Behind the wall was a concrete revetment on which the marks of a

wooden form showed that the concrete had been poured with this in place, which would not have been possible if the wall had been standing at that time.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1** A record has been made of the displaced headstones allowing for their re-setting, although many have probably already been removed from their original locations. The archaeological monitoring of the excavated foundation trench for the new section of wall, revealed post-medieval activity only. This comprised a group of graves dating from the 18th or 19th centuries. No evidence for any archaeological activity was revealed after the removal of the remaining section of collapsed wall.

## **9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS**

- 9.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. The digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.
- 9.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **218386**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

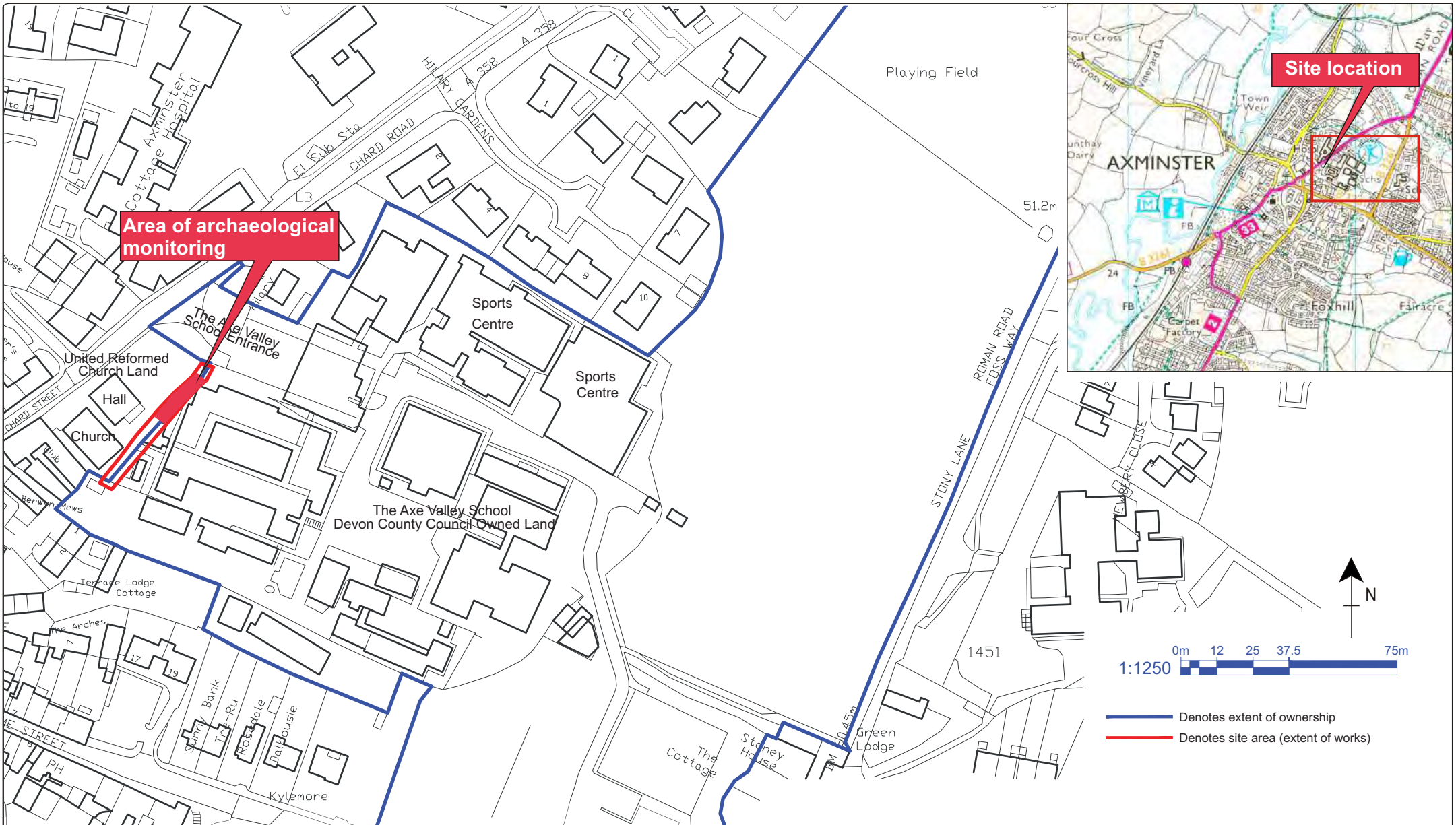
## **10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 10.1** The watching brief was commissioned by the Environment Agency. The site works were carried out by Paul Rainbird and Steve Robinson. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Nick Crabb and Elisabeth Patkai. The advice and collaboration of Stephen Reed, Devon Archaeology Officer, is duly acknowledged.

## **11. REFERENCES**

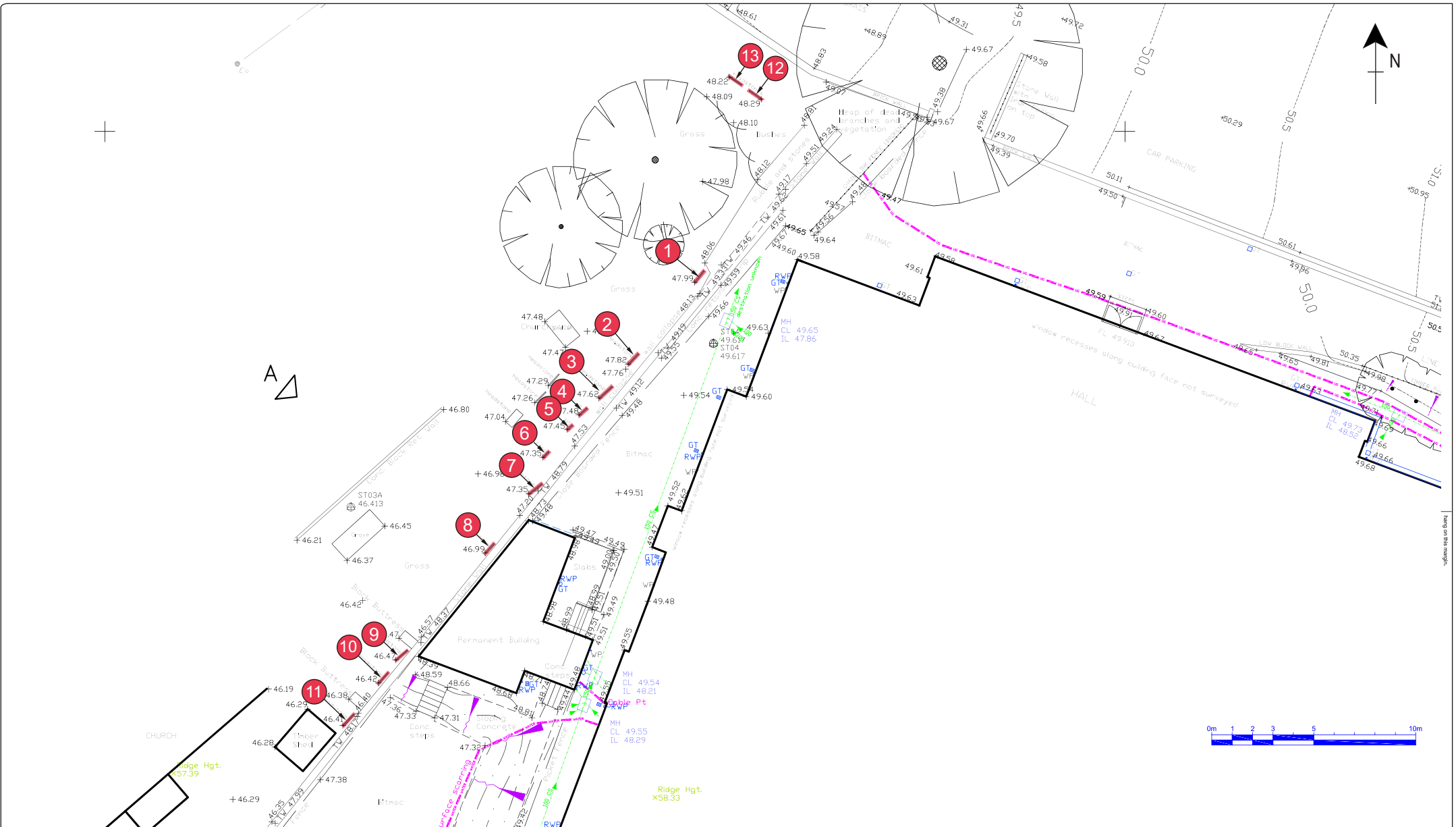
- British Geological Survey, 2015. *Online viewer*, [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)
- Oxford, 2015. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, [www.oxforddnb.com /view/article/57827](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57827)
- Salvatore, J. 2015. *Heritage Statement: Historic Boundary Wall and Land at United Reformed Church, Axminster, Devon*. Unpublished Oakford Archaeology report, ref 1247
- Tarlow, S. 1999. *Bereavement and Commemoration: An archaeology of mortality*. Oxford.





Drawing provided by NPS group

Fig. 1: Location of site



Drawing provided by NPS group

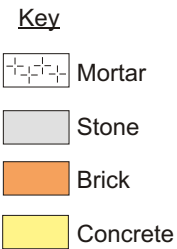
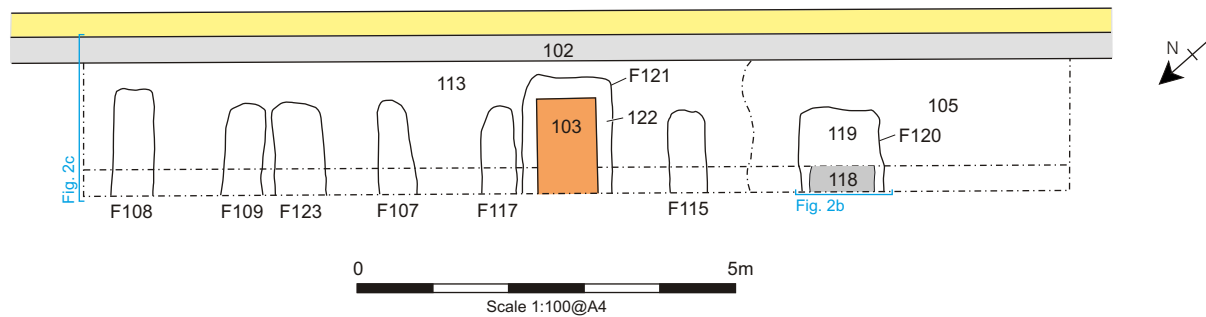


PROJECT  
 Land at the United Reformed Church,  
 Chard Street, Axminster

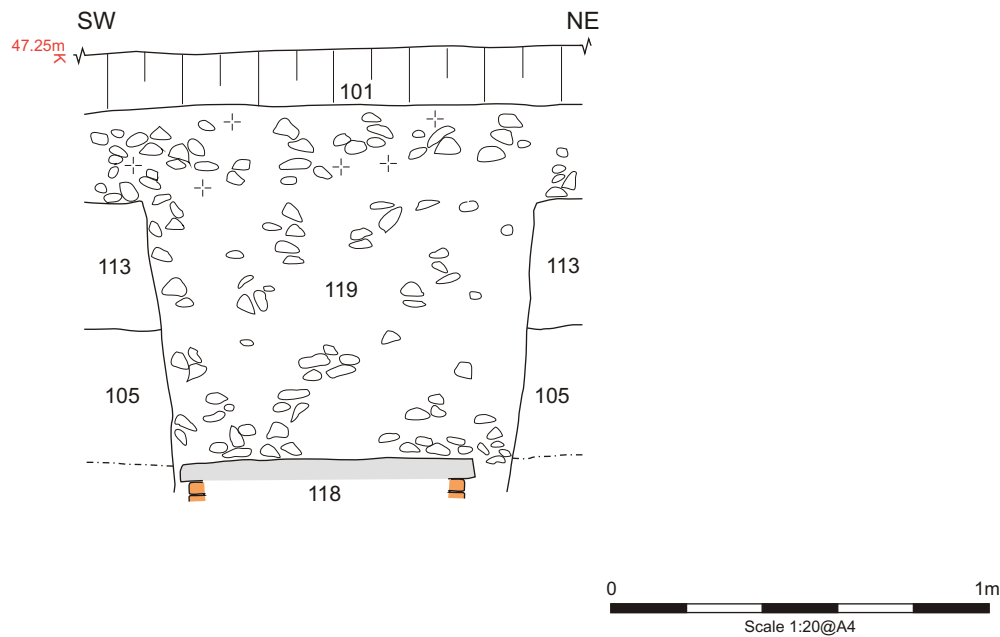
TITLE

Fig. 2: Headstone survey plan

a) Plan



b) Section



c) Section

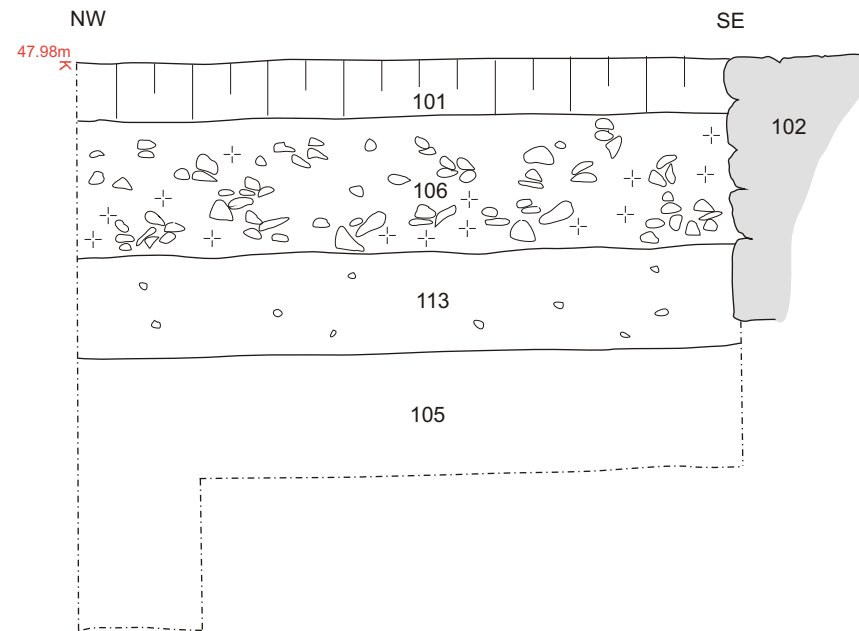


Fig. 3: Plans and sections of trench



Plate 1: General view of graveyard and wall collapse, looking east



Plate 2: General view of southeast boundary wall, prior to works, looking northeast



Plate 3: View of remaining boundary wall prior to removal, looking north



Plate 4: Repair to vaulted tomb 103, looking west



Plate 5: View of excavated trench, looking north




Plate 6: View of excavated trench, looking south

# Appendix 1


## Tabulated Headstone Descriptions

APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 1

Sacred	
To the memory of	
The Rev'd JAMES SMALL	
Forty eight years pastor of the	
Independent Church in this Town	
Who died the 22nd July ????	
MARTHA	
[illegible]	
WILLIAM	
[illegible]	
SARAH	
[illegible]	
ELEANOR	
[illegible] 180(4)?	
AMELIA	
[illegible] June 1812	

Headstone 2

In memory of	
ABRAHAM ORCHARD	
[illegible] 1852 Aged 86	
<i>An old disciple</i>	
Also MARY	
19th ???? 1857	
[script below illegible]	

APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 3

<p>Fallen on face</p> <p>When lifted no script visible</p>		
--	--	--


Headstone 4

<p>S C 1830</p> <p>[headstone on left in photograph]</p>	
--	--




APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 5


L W	
[Broken]  [headstone on right in photograph]	

Headstone 6


N D	
-----	---

APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 7

In memory of	
JAMES	
[illegible]	
Died Dec 22 18(2)6?	
[illegible]	
[illegible]	
In memory of	
JAMES WILLS	
Who died June 22 1860	
[illegible]	
Also	
SARAH	
His(?) beloved wife	
[illegible] 1879 [illegible]	

Headstone 8

[top half illegible]	
Also	
SUSANNA	
18(1)9? [illegible below]	

APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 9

In the memory of
MARY ANN DEANE
Wife of MP Joseph Deane
Who died March 24th 1859
Aged 35 years
JOSEPH DEANE
Who fell asleep Feb 6th 1886
Aged 76 years
Blessed are the dead who die in
The Lord



Headstone 10

In
Loving memory of
SARAH DEANE
Entered into rest
January 10th 1878
Aged 73 years
Looking unto Jesus
Also of
ELIZABETH DEANE
Who died April 10th 1898
Aged 82 years



APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 11

[illegible]
JOHN BOWDIDGE
[illegible]
Aged 72 years
Also of
ELIZABETH BUCKHOLE BOWDIDGE
Died January 27 1902
Aged 89 years



Headstone 12

In memory of
MARY EMILY
The beloved child
THO'BAYLIS & ELIZ EDWARDS
Who died
1 September 1841
Aged 6 years and 8 months
Jesus... [illegible]



APPENDIX 1: TABULATED HEADSTONE DESCRIPTIONS

Headstone 13

[illegible]	
THOMAS BAYLIS EDWARDS	
Of Axminster	
Who died 21st January 1881	
Aged 76 years	

### Devon Office

AC archaeology Ltd  
Unit 4, Halthaies Workshops  
Bradninch  
Nr Exeter  
Devon  
EX5 4LQ

Telephone/Fax: 01392 882410

### Wiltshire Office

AC archaeology Ltd  
Manor Farm Stables  
Chicklade  
Hindon  
Nr Salisbury  
Wiltshire  
SP3 5SU

Telephone: 01747 820581  
Fax: 01747 820440

[www.acarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.acarchaeology.co.uk)