AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED EXTENSION TO THE GRAVEYARD AT ST MARY'S CHURCH, CHURCH LANE, HEADLEY, SURREY

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Summary

A trial trench evaluation was undertaken on the site of the proposed extension to the graveyard at St Mary's Church, Headley, Surrey. Four trial trenches were excavated within the proposed area to the north of the church. A posthole of probable prehistoric origin and two pits of Neolithic or earlier date were revealed. A further posthole and pit adjacent to the prehistoric features were not possible to date although their proximity to those features may indicate a similar prehistoric origin.

Surrey County Archaeological Unit
Surrey History Centre,
130 Goldsworth Road, Woking,
Surrey, GU21 6ND

Tel: 01483 518777 Fax: 01483 518780
email: archaeology.scau@surreycc.gov.uk

website: www.surreycc.gov.uk/archaeology

Project Manager	Rob Poulton
Author	Nigel Randall
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On the 1st to the 3rd of February 2011, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) on the site of the proposed extension to the graveyard at St Mary's Church, Headley, Surrey (fig 1). The work was undertaken on behalf of Headley Parish Church Council who are applying for planning permission for the graveyard extension.

1.2 As part of the planning consultation process, the Surrey County Council Heritage Conservation Team Archaeological Officer (HCTAO), Gary Jackson recommended the preparation of a desk based archaeological assessment in order to consider the potential for archaeological remains existing within the proposed area. The assessment confirmed that the site lay adjacent to an Area of High Archaeological Potential (AHAP) as well as a designated County Site of Archaeological Importance (CSAI). An examination of the Historic Environment Record (HER) suggested that the general archaeological potential was moderate, as little archaeological material has been found from the vicinity of the site. The assessment went on to suggest that this is likely to be due to the limited amount of formal archaeological investigation that has taken place in the area, rather than to an absence of deposits, and noted that stray finds of prehistoric date have been most common from the surrounding area (Shaikhley 2010).

1.3 The HCTAO was consulted during the preparation of the assessment and he recommended a trial trench evaluation as being the most suitable form of investigation to establish the archaeological potential of the area (Shaikhley 2010). Headley Parish Church Council commissioned the Surrey County Archaeological Unit to carry out the evaluation.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The method of archaeological evaluation was determined by a Written Scheme of Investigation incorporated in the archaeological assessment (Shaikhley 2010) and approved by the HCTAO.

2.2 The evaluation was carried out using a 1.5 tonne mini excavator fitted with a 0.9m wide toothless bucket. Four evaluation trenches, 15m long by 1.6m wide, were excavated within the proposed development area (fig 2). The trenches were positioned to provide a balanced sample of the site. The location of Trench 1 was adjusted from the proposed location to avoid damaging the roots of the trees on the northern boundary of the site and to avoid a considerable drop in ground level adjacent to the boundary.

2.3 The machining process was carefully watched for the occurrence of any features or artefacts of archaeological interest that might relate to ancient activity in the immediate vicinity. The natural surface below the subsoil was carefully examined for evidence of features cutting it and hand excavation and recording carried out as necessary.

3. RESULTS

3.1 All four trenches revealed a broadly similar stratigraphy overlying the natural deposits of sandy clay, outcrops of clay, or clay with flints. Trench 1 showed a layer of recently made ground above the topsoil.

102 Topsoil A lightly compacted, 0.10 – 0.30m deep, dark grey/brown sandy clay with occasional inclusions of angular to rounded flint pebbles. It had a clear basal boundary with subsoil 103, which it overlay.

103 Subsoil A lightly compacted, 0.10 – 0.15m deep, mid orange/brown sandy clay with very frequent inclusions of angular to rounded flint pebbles. It had a clear basal boundary with the natural stratigraphy and, where present, with the second subsoil, which it overlay.

104 Second Subsoil A lightly compacted, 0.15 – 0.30m deep, mid orange/brown sandy clay with frequent to very frequent inclusions of angular to rounded flint pebbles. This second subsoil was restricted to Trench 1 and to the north end of Trench 2 and Trench 3. It lay beneath the subsoil (103). It had a diffused basal boundary with the sandy clay natural and a clearly defined basal boundary with the clay natural, where present.

Natural deposits The Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet 286 shows that the site lies on a deposit of clay with flints, overlying the Upper Chalk of the North Downs. It indicates occurrences of the Reading Beds and Thanet Beds sands in the vicinity of the church. These sandy deposits were noted in Trench 1 where they lay beneath the second subsoil and extended to a depth of greater than 1.60m

3.2 **Trench 1** 15m long by 1.6m wide, ranging in depth from 0.70m at its east end to 0.90m at its west end. A layer of made ground, present across the whole length of the trench, comprised of a dark grey/brown sandy clay, 0.35 and 0.50m deep, and very similar in character to the topsoil. It capped the true topsoil and showed a clear line of buried turf and root material at its base. This layer is considered to be the result of recent levelling across the northern-most edge of the field, using locally imported soil. No features of archaeological interest were noted in the trench.

3.3 **Trench 2** 15m long by 1.6m wide, ranging in depth from 0.60m at its north end to 0.25m at its south end. It revealed the following features (figs 2 and 3):

105 Posthole An ovoid post hole, 0.32m long, by 0.21m wide by 0.13m deep. It had a sharp break of slope to concave sides that rounded sharply to a round base. It had a single fill of uniform greenish brown sandy clay with occasional small rounded flint pebbles. No finds were recovered from the feature by which it could be dated.

106 Posthole An ovoid post hole, 4m to the south of post hole 105 and cutting feature 107. It measured 0.38m long, by 0.26m wide by 0.24m deep. It had a sharp break of slope to steep, concave sides that rounded sharply to a round base. It had a single fill of mid brown silty sand with occasional dark flecks of manganese. Two sherds of prehistoric pot were recovered, one of Bronze Age or earlier date, and one of Iron Age date. Three small fragments of burnt clay, two of which bear the imprint of walling wattles and a small quantity of burnt flint fragments were also recovered. The feature is considered to be of prehistoric date, most likely Iron Age.

107 Tree throw A curvilinear feature at the south end of the trench, cut by post hole 106. It measured 2.02m+ long, by 0.80m wide by 0.26m deep. It had a gradual break of slope to convex sides that rounded sharply to a round base. Its west edge had an irregular form. The north end of the feature had a rounded terminal with steep sides

and a slightly rounded base. It had a single fill of pale brown silty sand with occasional inclusions of flint pebbles and rare flecks of charcoal and burnt clay. A single burnt flint (not retained) was recovered from the fill. This lack of finds, the fine sandy nature of the fill and its irregular, curvilinear form suggest that it is probably a tree throw hole. It predates posthole 106.

3.4 **Trench 3** 15m long by 1.6m wide by 0.50m deep. It revealed the following features (figs 2 and 3):

108 Pit A sub-circular pit, 0.90m in diameter by 0.48m deep. It had an abrupt break of slope to steep, concave sides that became steeper and slightly convex on its south side, rounding sharply to a flat base. It had a fill of mid brown silty clay that became paler towards the base of the pit. A single, small sherd of calcined flint-gritted pottery of Bronze Age or Neolithic date was recovered. Four struck flints were also recovered, all in very fresh condition and probably of Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date. Twenty burnt flints and a fragment of bone (not retained) were also retrieve. The feature is most likely to be of prehistoric date, possibly Neolithic.

109 Pit An ovoid pit in the very north end of the trench, 1.10m north of pit 108. It measured 1.25m long by 0.87m+ wide by 0.74m deep. It had an abrupt break of slope and steep, straight sides that rounded sharply to a flat base. Much of the north-east side of the feature showed a degree of disturbance from animal burrowing, although the undisturbed extent of the feature was easily determined. The pit had an upper fill (109a) of dark brown, sandy clay with frequent inclusions of angular to rounded flint pebbles. It produced 19 struck flints of Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date, a fragment of daub and 19 burnt flints. A sherd of Roman fineware pottery, of later 3rd or 4th century date is considered intrusive, probably as a result of the burrowing disturbance.

The basal fill of the pit (109b) was a greenish brown, very sandy clay with rare flint pebbles of a similar nature to those in the upper fill. The majority of this fill was undisturbed by the burrowing activity and yielded 31 struck flints, all in very fresh condition and of the same type as those recovered from the upper fill. A small quantity of burnt flints was also recovered. The basal boundary of the pit was very diffused with the underlying sandy natural making a determination of its true form difficult. Most of the burrowing disturbance (109c), discernible as a darker brown fill with an increased occurrence of burnt flints, was within the upper fill. The majority of the seven struck flints recovered from the disturbed area were of the same type as those from the main fills.

The feature is considered to be of prehistoric date, most probably Early Neolithic although the possibility that it is of Mesolithic date cannot be ruled out.

110 Pit A sub-rectangular pit partially revealed in the south end of the trench, 1.18m long by 0.70m+ wide by 0.52m deep. It had a sharp break of slope to steep, slightly concave sides that rounded gradually to a flat base. The pit had a tertiary fill (110a) of mid grey/brown, silty clay with frequent inclusions of flint pebbles. It produced a single struck flint, two sherds of Roman pottery, one of 3rd century date, a fragment of roof tile, a short nail and four burnt flints.

The secondary fill (110b) was a mid to light brown sandy clay. It occupied the majority of the feature. The only finds recovered were a quantity of burnt flints.

The basal fill (110c, not visible in section) was present in the east side of the base and was similar to the tertiary fill but more compact and less moist. It produced three struck flints, including a rolled and glossy example, two sherds of calcined flint-tempered pottery of Bronze Age or possibly Neolithic date and a rim fragment from a Roman redware vessel. The mixed and rolled nature of these finds suggests that fill 110c may be the result of later disturbance, possibly animal burrowing as recorded in pit 109.

The mixed nature of the finds make it difficult to date the feature, however, the presence of three sherds of Roman pot from the upper and basal fills suggests it is of that or later date.

3.5 **Trench 4** 15m long by 1.6m wide by 0.40m deep. No features of archaeological interest were noted in the trench.

3.6 FLINT by Nick Marples (see Table 1)

3.6.1 Eighty-six worked flints weighing 1112g were recovered from 12 contexts containing lithic artefacts. Most (56 flints or 65%) were excavated from pit 109, four each from pits 108 and 110, and just over 25% of the total (22 flints) were collected from topsoil, subsoil and unstratified contexts. The majority of the flints from pit 109 (31 or 55%) were found in the secondary fill, 109B.

3.6.2 *Material*

Most of the material, especially from pit 109, has been produced from good quality, mid to dark grey flint with lighter mottled patches and thin unabraded grey/buff cortex. At least one piece has a thicker, off-white cortex suggesting a chalk flint source, but the flint could also have been obtained from a local clay-with-flints outcrop. One modified flake, and a blade or flake fragment from subsoil contexts 104 and 103 in trenches 1 and 3, are of Bullhead Bed flint, with coarse grey-green cortex and an orange sub-cortical banding. Bullhead Bed flint, which occurs at the base of the Reading Beds, is of good knapping quality, and seems to have been especially favoured in the Neolithic period for the production of scrapers, serrates and piercers. One small core (103, trench 3) has been manufactured on gravel pebble flint.

3.6.3 *Condition*

The flintwork is in variable condition; all of the finds from 'second subsoil' context 104 in trench 1 are rolled, but almost all of those from pits 109 and 108 are in mint condition, as are three flake or blade fragments from the subsoil in trench 3, which may be associated with the flints from pit 109. Five struck flints, three from 109 and one each from 108 and 103 in trench 3, have also been burnt.

3.6.4 *Summary*

Most of the flintwork from 109 may derive from the same parent nodule, although no re-fits have been identified as yet. One retouched flake of a greenish-brown hue is not quite as fresh as the rest of the assemblage, and may be of later date, but almost all of the remainder are likely to be coeval, and clearly derive from the same industry. No diagnostic tool or tool manufacturing forms are present, but the debitage, which comprises mainly waste flakes and probable flake fragments, includes four blades and three blade fragments, including two bladelets with notably curved profiles, as well as one core which has been used to produce bladelet forms, principally from two platforms at right angles to one another. Significantly, there are also six core dressings, suggesting the careful management of the flint resource. These include platform and platform

face/edge trimming flakes, a crested blade, and a plunging blade produced from a very small core with opposed platforms. Such pieces are characteristic of the Mesolithic period, but could also be of Early Neolithic origin. Four flints from pit 108, including a blade and a burnt blade fragment, are also in mint condition, and could be of similar date. The remainder from pit 109 are likely to be of later, probably Neolithic or Early Bronze Age manufacture, including a piercer produced on a grey/white patinated flake of earlier origin, which is likely to have been re-cycled.

3.7 POTTERY AND OTHER FINDS by Phil Jones (see Table 2)

3.7.1 *Summary*

The presence of prehistoric sherds, although in relatively small quantities, suggest occupation or other usage on or near the site, and the amount of earlier prehistoric flintwork in accompaniment indicate that this may have been prior to the Bronze Age. A single sherd of Iron Age pottery and the few rolled sherds of Roman date may only date their respective features (106 and 110), but the presence of an occupation site of either date in the vicinity cannot be ruled out. The single medieval sherd and finds of later material are of no archaeological significance

3.7.2 A total of thirteen sherds (93g), including five prehistoric, five Roman, one of medieval date and two of post-medieval redware were recovered. The prehistoric sherds include two from pit 110 (but in association with another that is Roman) that are of calcined flint-gritted fabrics and likely to be of Bronze Age or earlier date; two from posthole 106 that includes a similar sherd, in this instance a rim, but accompanied by a Middle to Late Iron age sherd of glauconitic ware; and one from Pit 108 that is also calcined flint-gritted.

3.7.3 Four of the five Roman sherds, from subsoil 103 and pit 110, are variants of the local greyware traditions and include the everted rim of a 3rd century-type jar (103, trench 3) and an overhanging rim of a jar or bowl (110a). The fifth sherd, from Pit 109, is of Oxfordshire colour coated fineware of later 3rd or 4th century date.

3.7.4 The medieval greyware sherd (104) is a tiny fragment; little can be said of the two post-medieval redware sherds (103 & 104).

3.8 Ceramic building materials

3.8.1 Thirty fragments of medieval or, perhaps more likely, post-medieval roof tile fragments were recovered from various contexts, but not from posthole 106 or pit 109. Part of a plain floor tile of post-medieval date was found in the subsoil and part of a brick was found unstratified.

3.8.2 Posthole 106 yielded three small fragments of burnt clay, including two of a sandy fabric that bear the impressions of walling wattles.

3.9 Calcined flints

3.9.1 118 pieces (2.7kg) of calcined flints were recovered from various contexts, seemingly largely from pre-broken nodules of flint from the chalk. The largest quantities came from pits 109 and 110.

3.10 Iron objects

3.10.1 The only other finds (apart from struck flints) were up to eight nails from subsoil 104 and another from Pit 110.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 A total of five features of archaeological interest were revealed, two postholes in trench 2 and three pits in trench 3; the other two trenches had no features of archaeological interest. Of the two postholes revealed in trench 2, one was of probable Iron Age date, the other could not be dated. The pits had substantially different fills and therefore seem unlikely to be associated with each other.

4.2 The three pits in trench 3 were of a similar size and depth; two (108 and 109) produced struck flint of Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date. Pit 109 also produced two sherds of pottery of possibly late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age type, although these may have been introduced by burrowing activity. Pit 108 produced a prehistoric sherd of Bronze Age or earlier date. It seems certain that both pits are of prehistoric date and, given the possible correlation in the dates of the struck flint and calcined flint-tempered pottery from 108, that they are of Neolithic date. The third pit in trench 3 (110) had a range of finds that included Bronze Age or earlier pottery, sherds of Roman pottery and medieval or post-medieval roof tile. The mix of finds may be due to later disturbance, possibly animal burrowing, making the feature difficult to date.

4.3 The presence of prehistoric features that might relate to settlement activity, particularly Neolithic, is an uncommon occurrence across the clay with flint deposits that cap the chalk of the North Downs. Most Neolithic evidence in Surrey comes from the Thames river gravels and a number of other riverine sites, widely scattered and producing usually isolated features containing struck flint and pottery (Field and Cotton 1987, 74). The presence of possible Neolithic features at Headley is therefore an unusual occurrence.

4.4 The HER records the discovery of Mesolithic flints and burnt stone from the high ground within Nower Wood, less than a kilometre to the west, and a ‘Thames Pick’, a type of Mesolthic flint pick, from Headley Heath, 1.3km to the south. It also records several surface finds of Neolithic tools and struck flints from a similar area of Headley Heath but no indication of settlement activity is recorded.

4.5 The Roman pottery (five sherds) may indicate the presence of nearby settlement activity. Most were rolled and generally from the subsoil or the upper fill of pits 109 and 110. No features of definite Roman date were revealed, although pit 110 may be of Roman origin, but a fair degree of Roman activity is noted in the HER; the line of the Roman road, Stane Street lies two kilometres to the west and a small Roman building of 4th century date was excavated within the grounds of Headley Court, 1km to the north-west. Signs of similar structures, as well as coins from the 3rd and 4th century are recorded in Tyrell’s Wood.

4.6 No evidence of any activity relating to the presence of the medieval church, to the south of the present church, was noted. Similarly, apart from a few fragments of roof and floor tile, very little medieval or post medieval material was recovered suggesting that the field lay beyond any area of activity surrounding the earlier church.

4.7 The most important evidence is clearly from trench 3 and there are no features and very few finds of similar Neolithic or earlier date from elsewhere. This suggests that the key activity area is confined to that vicinity at that period. The only man-made features of possible ancient date elsewhere are the postholes in trench 2. Their

significance is hard to determine. One is undated, the other has an Iron Age sherd as the latest material within it, and includes daub with wattle impressions, suggestive of an ancient structure. The absence of other features or finds of a similar date would seem to indicate this feature, if it is truly associated with Iron Age occupation, is on the periphery of activity that is presumably focussed towards the south-west.

REFERENCES

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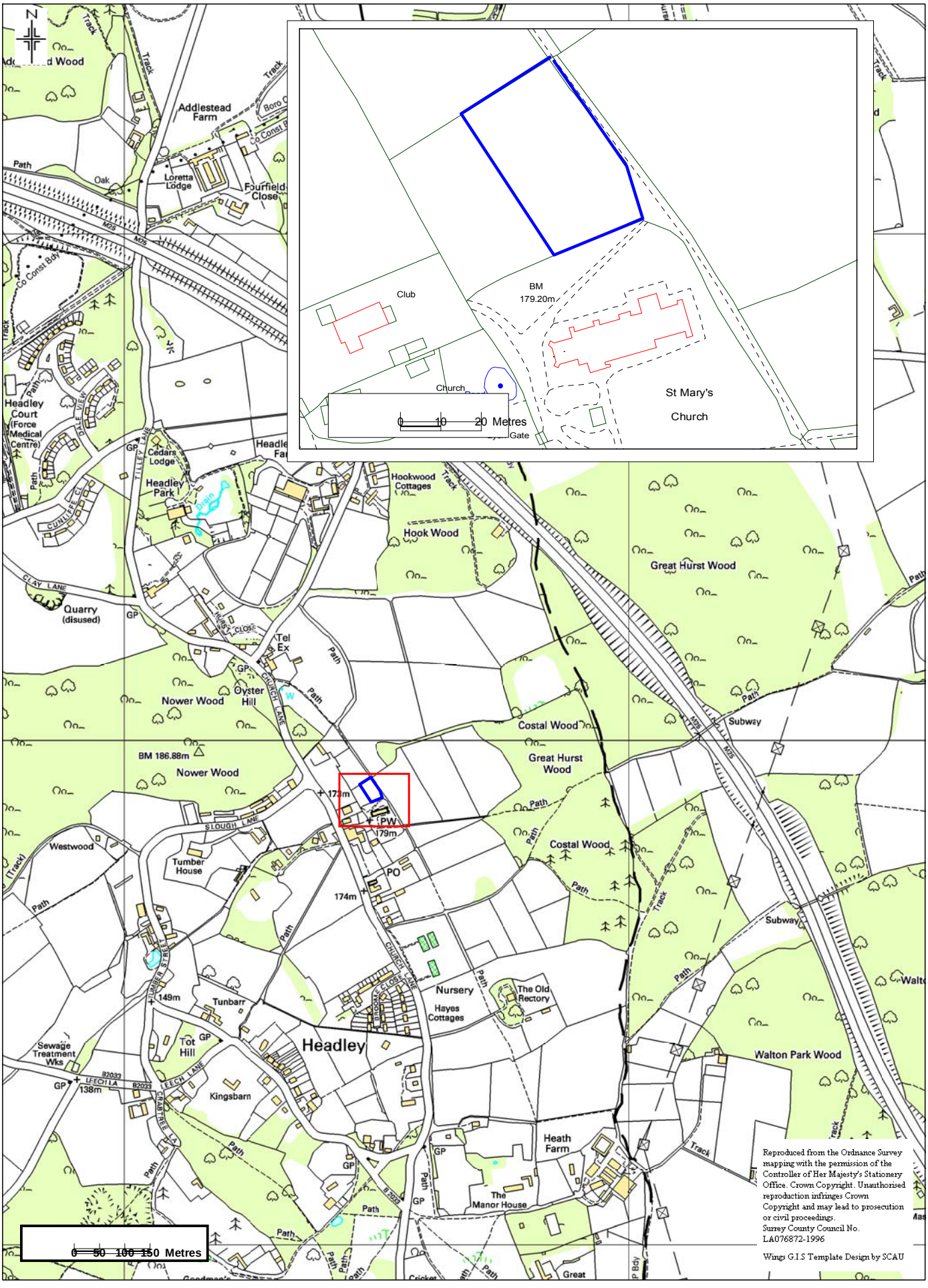

Figure 1 Proposed extension to the graveyard at St Mary's Church, Church Lane, Headley: General site location

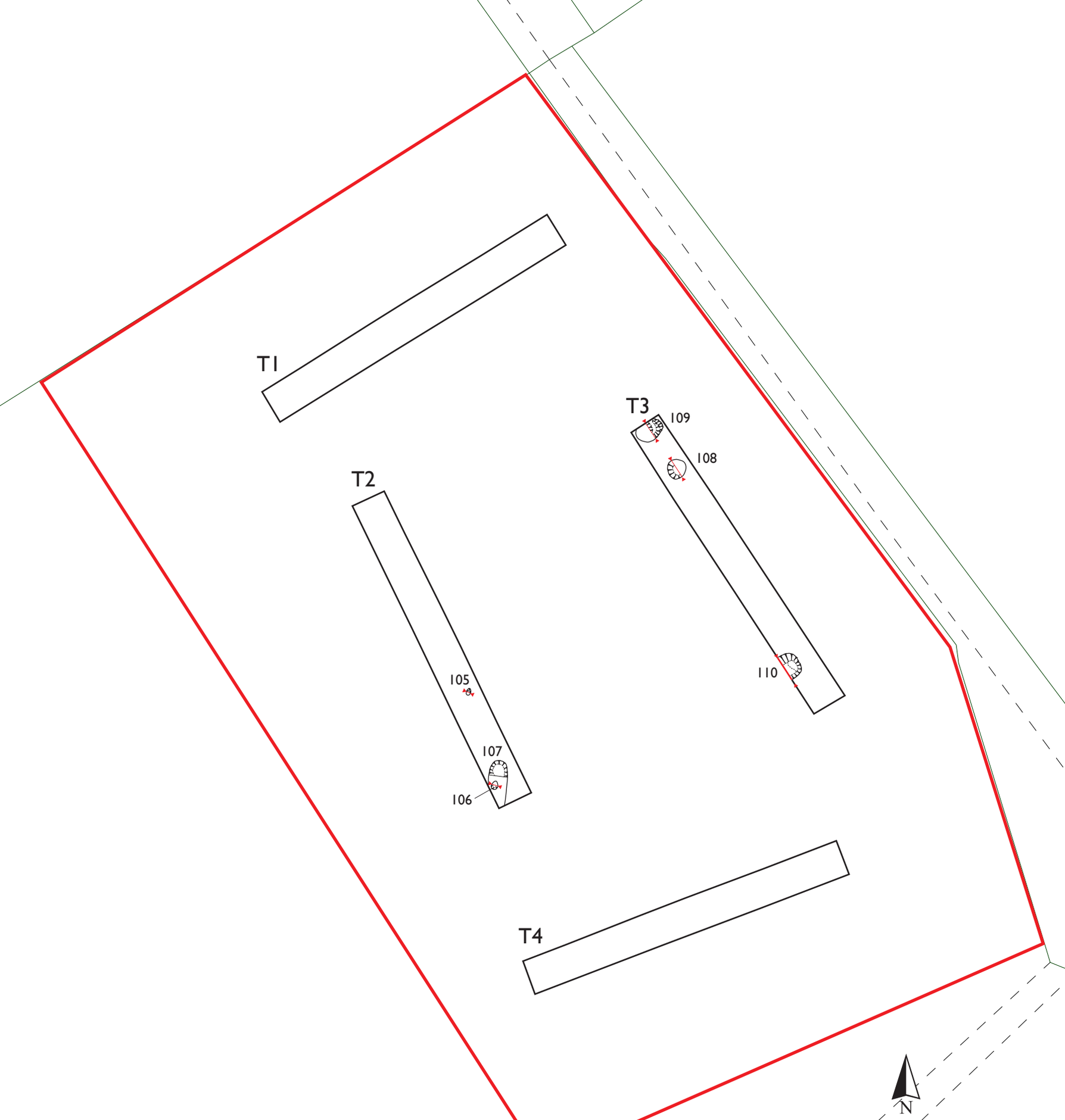

Figure 2 St Mary's Church, Headley: Trial trench and feature location plan

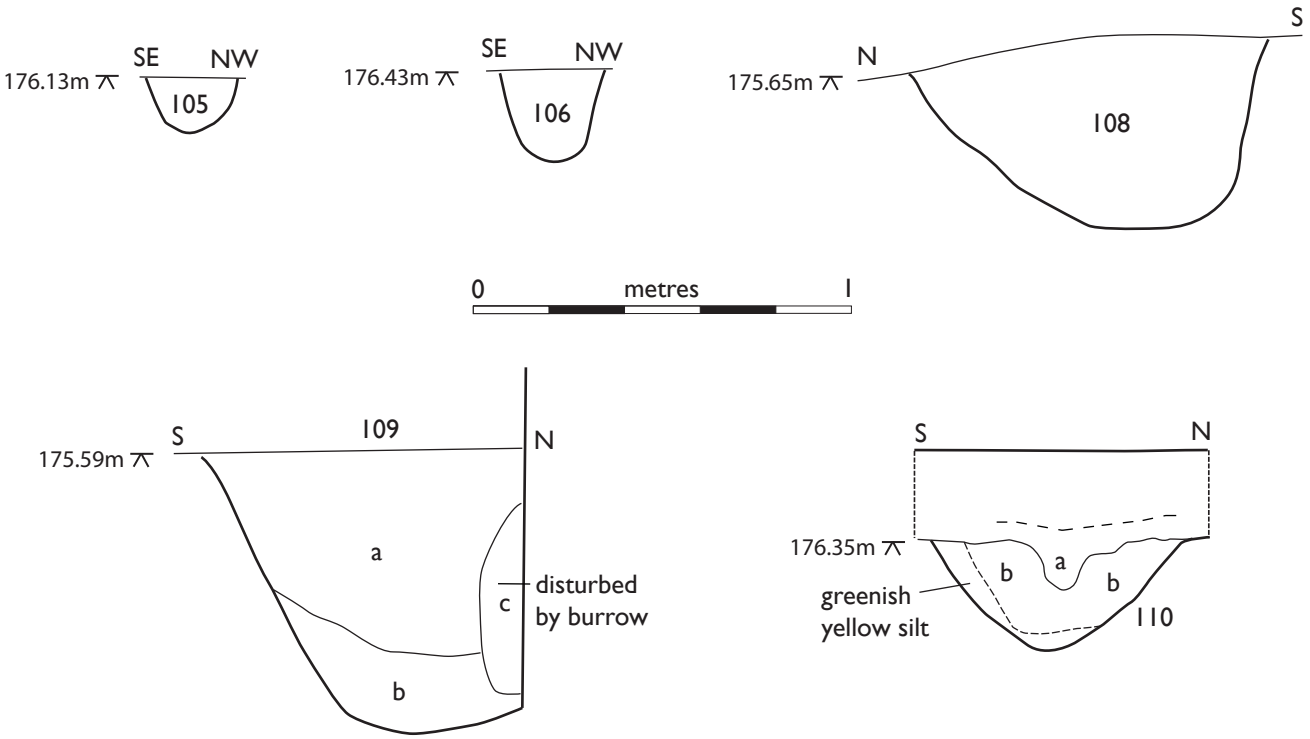

Figure 3 St Mary's Church, Headley: Sections of features (see fig 2 for section locations)