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HAYDON OLD CHURCH,  
HAYDON BRIDGE,  
NORTHUMBERLAND

~ ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ~

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MAY 2021



Prepared for: *Haydon Bridge PCC*

By: *The Archaeological Practice Ltd.*

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HAYDON BRIDGE,  
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REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Prepared by:

*The Archaeological Practice Ltd.*



**Frontispiece:** View south towards Haydon Old Church site, with tree cover obscuring Haydon Bridge in the Tyne Valley below, but Langley Castle visible to the south-west at top right of view.

**Grid Reference:** NZ 20884 61389  
**Client:** Haydon Bridge PCC (c/o Mr Benjamin Carter)  
**Dates of fieldwork:** 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> May 2021  
**Project Code:** AP 21/10  
**Oasis Number:** thearcha2-423267

## **CONTENTS**

### **SUMMARY**

- 1. PURPOSE OF THE WATCHING BRIEF**
- 2. CULTURAL HERITAGE BACKGROUND**
- 3. WATCHING BRIEF**
- 4. RESULTS**
- 5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**
- 6. REFERENCES**

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**Front Cover:** *The north wall of the chancel at Haydon Old Church, with groundworks underway.*

**Frontispiece:** *View south towards Haydon Old Church site, with tree cover obscuring Haydon Bridge in the Tyne Valley below, but Langley Castle visible to the south-west at top right of view.*

### **Location Maps and Plans:**

**Illus. 01:** *Illus. 01: Regional view, showing the location of Haydon Bridge, west of Hexham. Illus.*

**02:** *Local view, showing the location of the site.*

**Illus. 03:** *Detailed view, showing the church within the churchyard.*

### **Historic Maps & Documents:**

**Illus. 04:** *Historic 1st Edition OS Mapping, showing the location of the development site (highlighted in red).*

### **Site Drawings**

**Illus. 05:** *Overview plan of groundworks.*

**Illus. 06:** *Plan of stone footing on the west side of the chancel.*

**Illus. 07:** *Plan of possible stone footing on the south side of the chancel.*

### **Photographic Record:**

- *Photo 1. Soakaway pit 1 looking south.*
- *Photo 2. View looking west from soakaway pit 1 towards the excavations for the drain.*
- *Photo 3. View looking west at excavations for the drain.*
- *Photo 4. The chancel plinth revealed in excavations for the drain. South view.*
- *Photo 5. View looking south in the return of the trench for the drain.*
- *Photo 6. The foundations adjacent to the north buttress on the west wall. South view.*
- *Photo 7. The footing adjacent to the north buttress on the west wall, photographed in plan.*
- *Photo 8. soakaway pit 2 looking south.*
- *Photo 9. soakaway pit 2 looking north, showing the layer of sandstone rubble.*
- *Photo 10. The channel leading from guttering by the church door to soakaway pit 2, looking north-west.*

- *Photo 11. The channel feeding into soakaway pit 2 looking south-west, showing a layer of sandstone rubble.*
- *Photo 12. Soakaway pit 3, looking east.*
- *Photo 13. The channel feeding into soakaway pit 3, looking west, showing historical alterations to the memorial plot coping.*
- *Photo 14. Possible footing in situ near to the south-east chancel corner. North view.*
- *Photo 15. Worked masonry found atop a pile of masonry rubble and soil adjacent to the east churchyard wall.*
- *Photo 16. Worked masonry found atop a pile of masonry rubble and soil adjacent to the east churchyard wall.*
- *Photo 17. A near complete 'wrestler' ridge tile from soakaway pit 2.*
- *Photo 18. A large chunk of chamfered masonry, recovered from soakaway pit 3.*
- *Photo 19. A large chunk of chamfered masonry, recovered from soakaway pit 3.*
- *Photo 20. A metal object, possibly a hanging fixture, recovered from soakaway pit 3.*

## SUMMARY

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*This document reports on a process of archaeological monitoring conducted in May 2021 during groundworks associated with improved drainage at Haydon Old Church, Haydon Bridge. The mitigation was designed to satisfy a condition issued by the Diocesan Archaeological Committee; the groundworks were considered likely to disturb or damage archaeological remains surviving within the churchyard. The watching brief was carried out in May 2021, and all intrusive excavation works associated with the drainage scheme were monitored.*

*It is concluded that no graves or cut archaeological features were disturbed during hand excavation at Haydon Old Church. The deposits encountered during groundworks consisted of topsoil and backfill of modern drainage features. The masonry fragments and human bones encountered in pits 1-3 show a large level of repeated disturbance in the churchyard. This is unsurprising given the various works carried out on the church buildings and historic burial practices resulting in the disturbance of earlier graves.*

*The most significant discoveries were the probable footings of the 1795 buttress on the west wall of the church and the possible footing at the south-east corner of the chancel. The former structure is exactly where the 1795 buttress is projected to have stood, while what the latter structure represents is unclear. No further stonework was encountered in the area.*

*No further archaeological monitoring is required during the groundworks associated with this scheme. However, given the potential for significant archaeological deposits to exist between the existing church buildings and the road, as well as the high likelihood of encountering human remains, it is recommended that any future interventions should involve archaeological monitoring.*

## 1. PURPOSE OF WATCHING BRIEF

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**1.1** This document reports on a process of archaeological monitoring conducted in May 2021 during groundworks associated with improved drainage at Haydon Old Church, Haydon Bridge, centred on grid reference NY 84230 65296 (*see Illus. 01-03*). The work was carried out for Haydon Bridge PCC (c/o Mr Benjamin Carter) to specifications from architect Chris Blackburn.

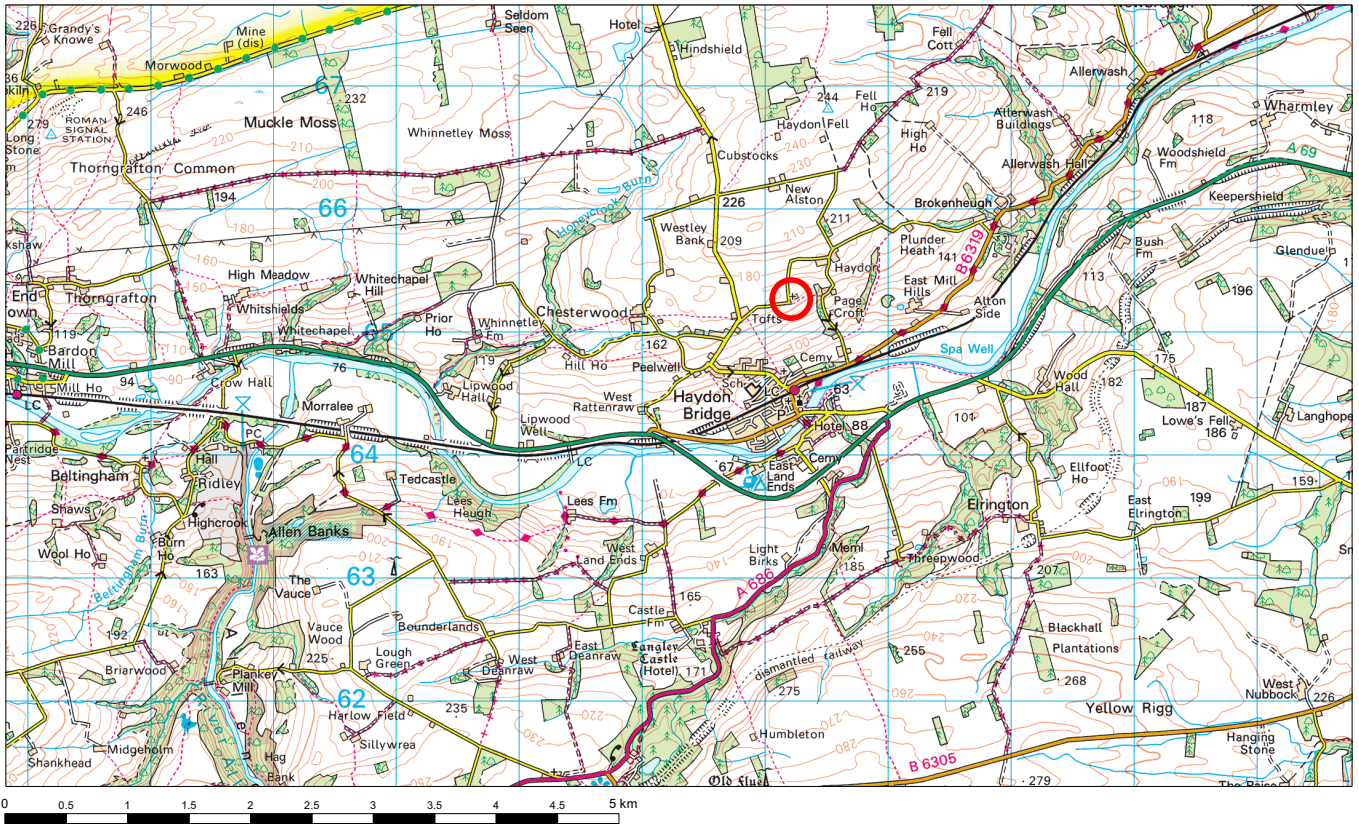
**1.2** The groundworks consisted of the excavation of trenches and pits for new drainage. The proposed drainage scheme was being carried out to rectify dampness problems due partly to the failure of the roof and partly to inadequate modern drainage. The mitigation was designed to satisfy a condition issued by the Diocesan Archaeological Committee; the groundworks were considered likely to disturb or damage archaeological remains surviving within the churchyard. The watching brief was carried out in May 2021, and all intrusive excavation works associated with the drainage scheme were monitored.

**1.3** The Church, situated on the South Tyne valley slope to the north of the settlement of Haydon Bridge, has existed in its present form since C. C. Hodges' 1882 restoration. The site layout, barring changes to the church building, has remained unchanged since its depiction on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map of 1860. The sequence of changes to the church further back in time is fairly well understood, with an article from Hodges (1883) and a recent guidebook (Telford 2010) providing an overview, before comprehensive assessment by Ryder (2011).

**1.4** The present churchyard appears to have piles of masonry rubble covered by earth in places, likely related to historic demolitions and refurbishments (*see section 2 below*). Ryder noted scattered stone north of the yew avenue when considering the location of the demolished nave and tower (2011: 7). More conspicuous upon site inspection in 2021 was the pile of earth and stone against the north-east corner of the churchyard retaining walls. Found on this pile was a loose piece of decorative masonry (*see Photos 15-16*).



*Illus. 01: Regional view, showing the location of Haydon Bridge (circled in red), west of Hexham.*

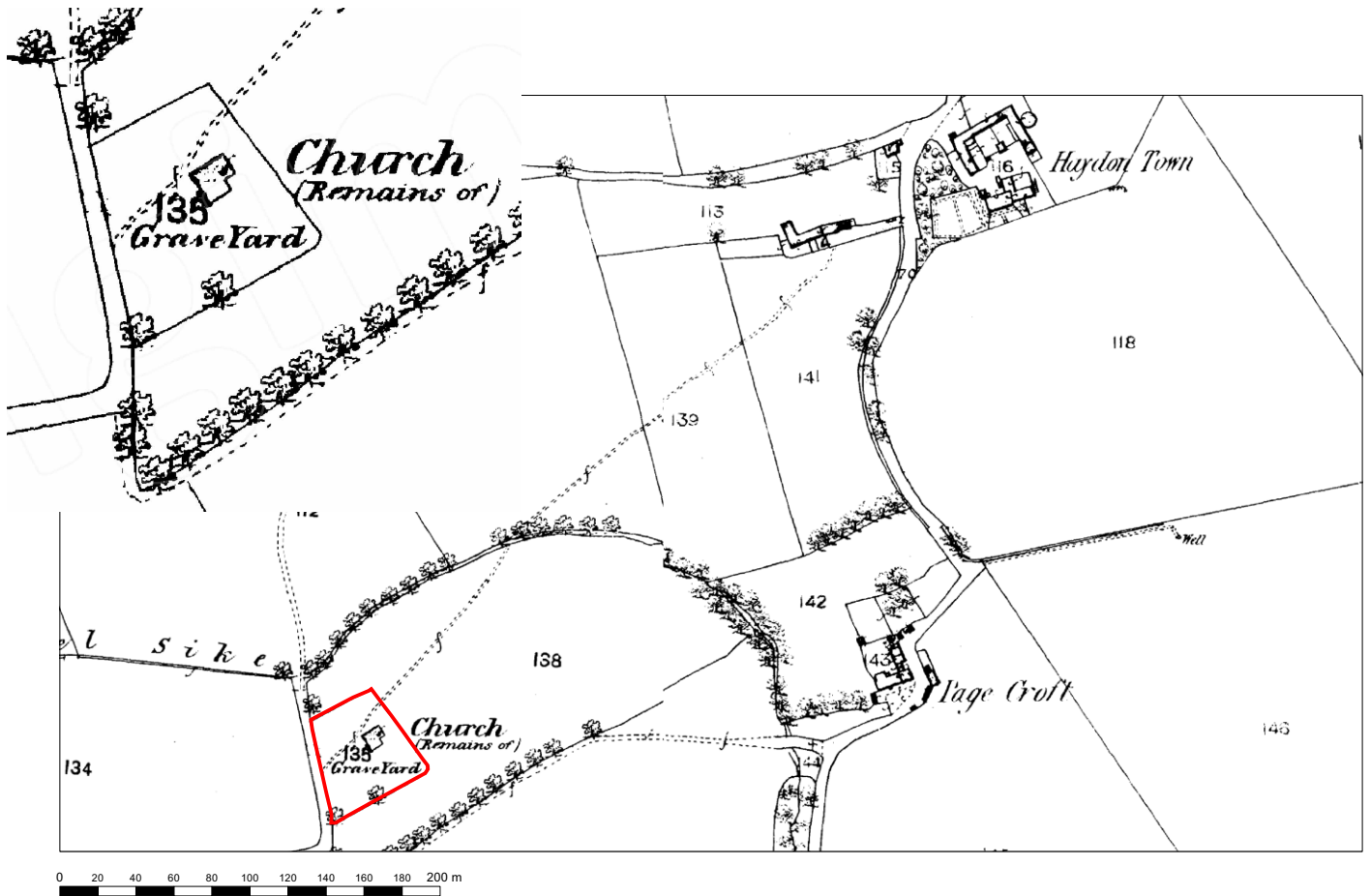


*Illus. 02: Local view, showing the location of the site (circled in red).*





*Illus. 03: Detailed view, showing the church within the churchyard (in lighter green).*



*Illus. 04: Historic 1st Edition OS Mapping, showing the location of the development site (highlighted in red).*

## 2. HISTORIC BACKGROUND

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**2.1** A church might plausibly have been in existence on the site of Haydon Old Church as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> Century – the journey of the monks of Lindisfarne with the relics of St Cuthbert took in Haydon Bridge, hence the dedication of Haydon Bridge’s succession of parish churches to St Cuthbert. The present building of Haydon Old Church is thought to have originated c. 1190, based on the characteristics of the chancel. It is first referred to in 1256, serving as a chapel of ease to the parish church of Warden. Later, it was granted to the monks of Hexham by the Lord of Langley. Its footprint was once much longer than the short building extant today, with the nave and west tower extending towards the present road, possibly in the location of the lines of yews flanking the paths from the church gate to the church building.

**2.2** Significant alterations appear to have been made to the church centuries after its construction. Much of the fabric of the chapel is considered to date to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, while an earlier buttress at its south-west corner may indicate that the chapel possessed transepts.

**2.3** In 1795, the church was partially demolished, with the nave and tower to the west of the present chancel torn down for their stone. A new west chancel wall was constructed at this point, and remodeled again during Hodges’ 1882 refurbishment, with Hodges also replacing a large 1795 buttress with a neat, stepped buttress. The current roof structure wholly originates from Hodges’ refurbishment, albeit with the pre-1882 ‘wrestler’ ridge tiles preserved or reinstated.

### 3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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The watching brief took place during all invasive groundworks carried out at Haydon Old Church. These groundworks consisted of a shallow excavation for a French drain along the north and west sides of the chancel and three separate pits for soakaways to the east and south of the church. All excavations were conducted by hand.

The aims of the watching brief were to identify and determine the character of any remains uncovered during groundworks on the site, and to make an appropriate record of significant finds and features, including in situ burials, by photographic and other means. This included the photographic recording of negative results. As with any churchyard excavation, a secondary aim of the watching brief was to collect any disarticulated human bone encountered during the groundworks in order that it could be appropriately reinterred by the church.

All intrusive groundworks likely to impact on archaeological remains were monitored between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021. All excavations were closely monitored by a suitably trained and experienced archaeologist from The Archaeological Practice Ltd.

## 4. RESULTS

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### 4.1 Excavations for a French Drain

A trench 0.45 m wide and approximately 0.45 m deep was excavated along the north and west sides of the chancel wall (*see Photos 02-07*), revealing the chancel's plinth (*see Photo 04*). This trench extended from the 1882 (northern) buttress on the west wall via the north-west chancel corner to a soakaway pit 2.40 m from the north-east corner of the chancel building (pit 1, below). An *in-situ* drainage run was extant in the trench in roughly the same position as the proposed French drain on both lengths of the trench. It consisted of mismatched lengths of ceramic pipe, some glazed and some unglazed. The pipes were mostly blocked with organic materials and soil and likely date to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The only feature of note within this trench was a stone footing found in the base of the trench north of and adjacent to the extant 1882 buttress (*see Illus. 06*). This footing was likely for the large 1795 buttress referred to by Hodges, matching well with its projected position (Ryder 2011: 7). Just three fragments of disarticulated human bone were found during the course of these excavations. The material throughout the trench consisted dark grey-brown sandy soil with frequent gravel inclusions and represents backfill of the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century drainage run.

### 4.2 Excavations of three Soakaway Pits

Three soakaway pits were excavated in the churchyard to receive water from improved guttering (*see Illus. 05*). These pits, in order of excavation, were placed 2.40 m from the north-east corner of the chancel (pit 1), 2.40 m from the south-west corner of the chapel in front of the chapel door (pit 2) and 2.40m from the south-east corner of the chancel (pit 3). All pits were 0.90 m by 0.90 m in plan and were excavated to depth of up to 0.90 m.

Pit 1 (*see Photo 01*) contained frequent masonry fragments, many of them large, presumably from historic demolition and refurbishment of the church buildings. No features or significant finds were encountered, and no disarticulated bone was found. The entire pit consisted of a dark grey-brown topsoil, with frequent roots.

Pit 2 (*see Photos 08-09*) contained an initial layer of loose sandstone rubble overlying dark grey-brown topsoil. No cut features were encountered. Far fewer fragments of masonry were present in this pit, although a complete 'wrestler' ridge tile was found 0.45 m down from surface level. Pit 2 contained a large number of disarticulated and often fragmentary bones. The channel leading from the chapel corner to the soakaway pit (*see Photos 10-11*) was also devoid of features and finds, barring few fragmentary pieces of human bone.

Pit 3 (*see Photo 12*) contained many masonry fragments, similar to pit 1. One notable large fragment found high in the pit was neatly chamfered (*see Photos 18-19*). A metal object, possibly a hanging fixture for candles or similar (*see Photo 20*), was also found within the top 0.45 m of the pit. No cut features were encountered. The earth in the pit was a dark grey-brown topsoil, consistent with that encountered in the other pits. Pit 3 was located between two headstones, but no articulated human remains were encountered, and less disarticulated remains were encountered than in pit 2.

In the channel excavated from the chancel corner to the soakaway (pit 3), one piece of *in-situ* masonry measuring 0.27 m by at least 0.20 m in plan and with a depth of at least 0.10 m, was encountered on the south wall of the chancel, 0.28 m from the south-east chancel corner (see *Illus. 07, Photo 14*). The stone was overlain by the chancel south wall and may have represented a footing for a structure predating the 14<sup>th</sup> century chapel, although this is unclear. No further masonry or masonry fragments were encountered. More defunct 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century drainage was present here, running though the coping of the memorial plot against the south wall of the chancel, which it post-dated – the coping had been roughly bored through below ground level in order for the drainpipe to pass under it.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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**5.1** No graves or cut archaeological features were disturbed during hand excavation at Haydon Old Church. All disarticulated human bones recovered were handed back to the church to be reinterred.

**5.2** The deposits encountered during groundworks consisted of topsoil and backfill of modern drainage features. The masonry fragments and human bones encountered in pits 1-3 show a large level of repeated disturbance in the churchyard. This is unsurprising given the various works carried out on the church buildings and historic burial practices resulting in the disturbance of earlier graves.

**5.3** The most significant discoveries were the probable footings of the 1795 buttress on the west wall of the church and the possible footing at the south-east corner of the chancel. The former structure is exactly where the 1795 buttress is projected to have stood, while what the latter structure represents is unclear. No further stonework was encountered in the area.

**5.4** No further archaeological monitoring is required during the groundworks associated with this scheme. However, given the potential for significant archaeological deposits to exist between the existing church buildings and the road, as well as the high likelihood of encountering human remains, it is recommended that any future interventions should involve archaeological monitoring.

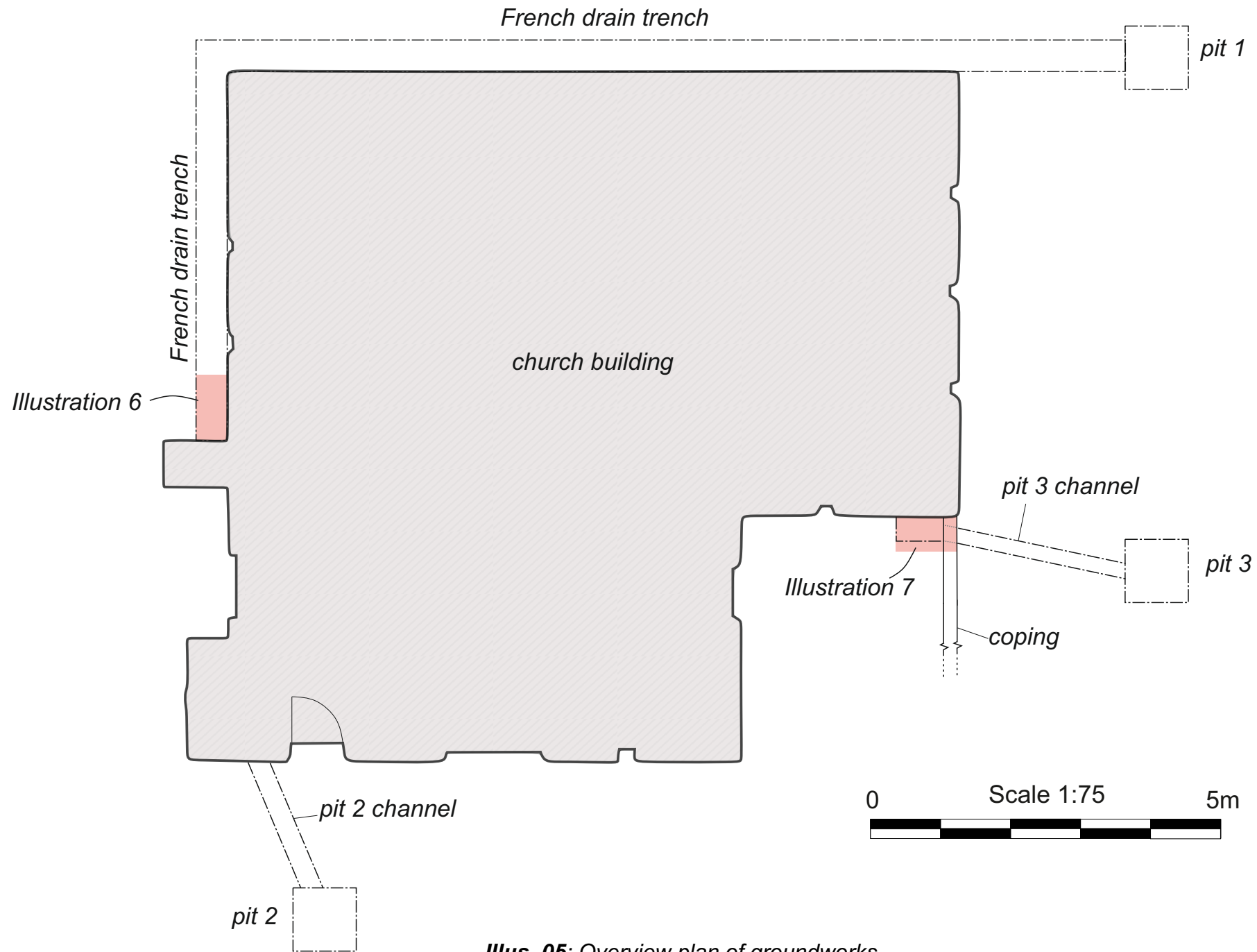
## 6. REFERENCES

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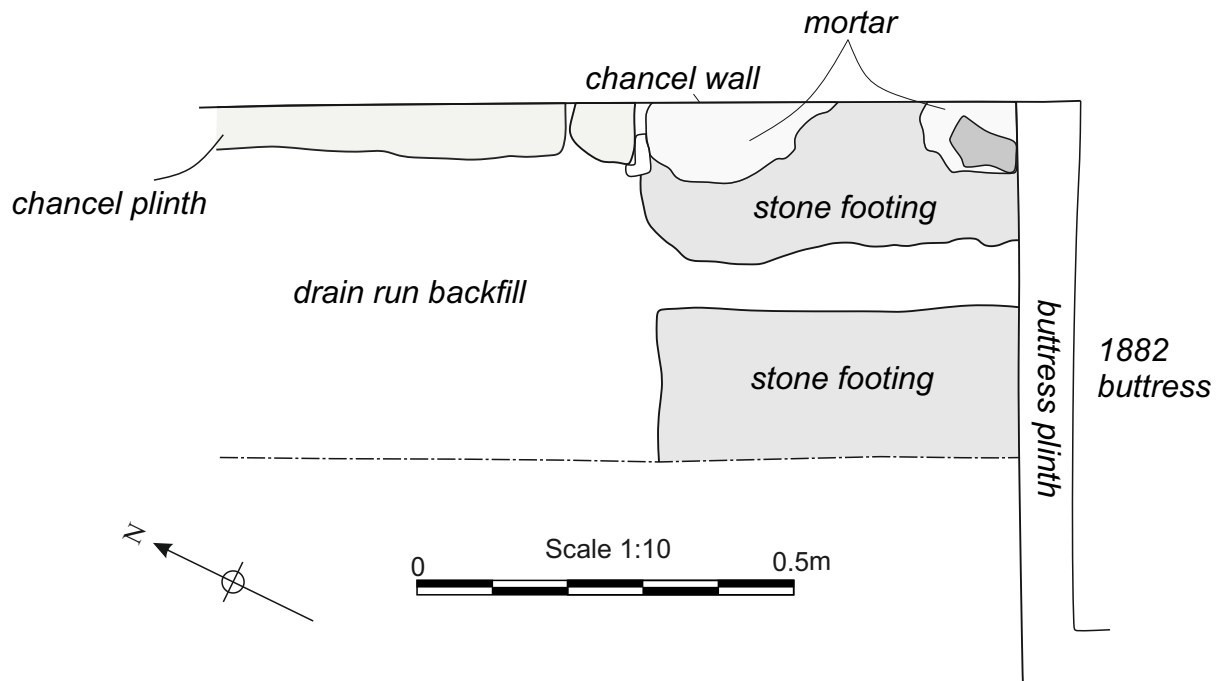
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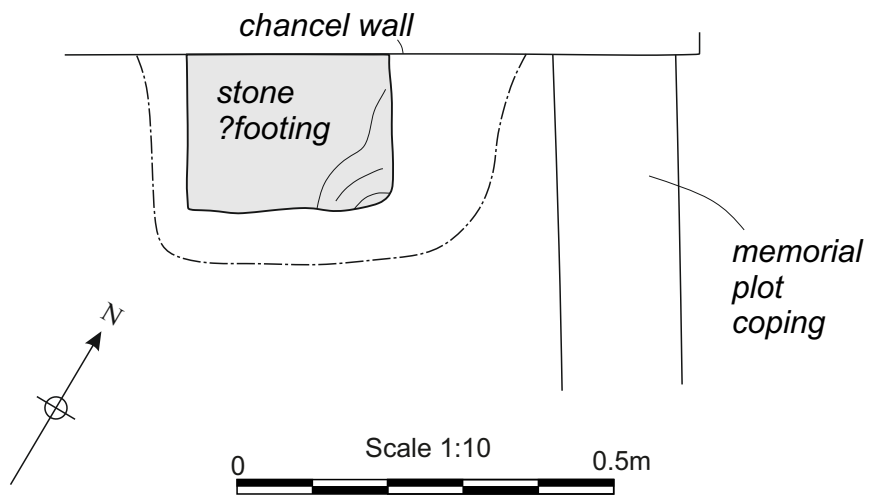


**Illus. 05:** Overview plan of groundworks.





**Illus. 06:** Plan of stone footing on the west side of the chancel.



**Illus. 07:** Plan of possible stone footing on the south side of the chancel.



**Photo 01.** Soakaway pit 1 looking south.



**Photo 02.** View looking west from soakaway pit 1 towards the excavations for the drain.



**Photo 03.** View looking west at excavations for the drain.



**Photo 04.** The chancel plinth revealed in excavations for the drain. South view.



**Photo 05.** View looking south in the return of the trench for the drain.



**Photo 06.** The foundations adjacent to the north buttress on the west wall. South view..



**Photo 07.** The footing adjacent to the north buttress on the west wall, photographed in plan



**Photo 08.** Soakaway pit 2 looking south



**Photo 09.** Soakaway pit 2 looking north, showing the layer of sandstone rubble



**Photo 10.** The channel leading from guttering by the church door to soakaway pit 2, looking north-west.



**Photo 11.** The channel feeding into soakaway pit 2 looking south-west, showing a layer of sandstone rubble.



**Photo 12.** Soakaway pit 3, looking east.



**Photo 13.** The channel feeding into soakaway pit 3 looking west, showing historical alterations to the memorial plot coping.



**Photo 14.** Possible footing in situ near to the south-east chancel corner. North view.



**Photo 15.** Worked masonry found atop a pile of masonry rubble and soil adjacent to the east churchyard wall.



**Photo 16.** Worked masonry found atop a pile of masonry rubble and soil adjacent to the east churchyard wall.



*Photo 17. A near complete 'wrestler' ridge tile from soakaway pit 2.*



*Photo 18. A large chunk of chamfered masonry, recovered from soakaway pit 3.*





**Photo 19.** A large chunk of chamfered masonry, recovered from soakaway pit 3.



**Photo 20.** A metal object, possibly a hanging fixture, recovered from soakaway pit 3.