

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF AT  
ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, UPTON  
WARREN, WORCESTERSHIRE

Tom Vaughan and Tom Rogers

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project P2820  
Report 1377  
WSM 34758



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## **Archaeological watching brief at St Michael's Church, Upton Warren, Worcestershire**

**Tom Vaughan and Tom Rogers**

**Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt**

### **Part 1 Project summary**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of the Parochial Church Council and Stainburn Taylor and Michael Reardon architects at St Michael's Church, Upton Warren, Worcestershire (NGR ref 3931,2675; WSM 34758) in October 2005 and January 2006. Refurbishment works to the church include repairs to the suspended timber floor of the nave, where three areas were reduced in level by hand to a maximum depth of 0.4m. Eight trial pits were also excavated adjacent to the central aisle of the nave. A single modern layer of silty sand was uncovered across these areas. A small amount of human bone was recovered from this context, but this was disarticulated and did not represent an existing burial. A brick vault was uncovered in the northern aisle of the nave at the eastern end. The bricks were handmade and the vault lay beneath a 1760 memorial to the Parsons family.

In a second phase of the watching brief carried out in January 2006, archaeological observation was undertaken during excavation for a water pipe to serve the new toilet at the north-west corner of the church. A single trench was excavated adjacent to the western wall of the nave and extending south of the nave another 4.5m on the same line into the gravel path leading to the church door. At a distance of 2.4m from the wall of the church, a stone structure was recorded crossing the trench from east to west. It was built of shaped blocks of green sandstone with no visible mortar. It is suggested that this may be the wall of a vault or the foundation of an earlier layout of the church itself. A single fragment of shaped red sandstone was recorded projecting from the section at the base of the trench slightly north of the stone feature.

## Part 2 Detailed report

### 1. Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Michael's Church, Upton Warren (NGR ref 3931,2675; WSM 34758), Upton Warren, Worcestershire (Fig 1) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council and Stainburn, Taylor and Michael Reardon Architects. The church is currently undergoing renovation works, which include the replacement of the wooden floor and provision of a toilet.

#### 1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999) and to a project proposal, including detailed specification (HEAS 2005).

#### 1.3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to locate archaeological deposits and determine, if present, their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation. The purpose of this was to establish their significance, since this would make it possible to recommend an appropriate treatment, which may then be integrated with the proposed refurbishment programme.

### 2. Methods

#### 2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER). In addition the following sources were also consulted:

- County histories (VCH III, 231-234).
- Domesday (Thorn and Thorn 1983).
- Pevsner, N 1968.

#### 2.2 Fieldwork methodology

##### 2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2005).

Fieldwork was undertaken in October 2005 and January 2006. The site reference number and site code is WSM 34758. Excavation for phase 1 of the works, within the church was undertaken in October 2005. Excavation of the service trench was carried out in January 2006. One section of the service trench to the north of the church (Fig 2) was not observed. All excavations on site were carried out by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Any human remains were not removed from the church but were left approximately where they were found. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995).

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### 2.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

### 2.3 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

## 3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The earliest recorded entry on the Historic Environment Record for Upton Warren is a find of Pleistocene animal bones (WSM 04151) south east of the village, including mammoth, bison and reindeer in a river terrace. These have been radiocarbon dated to 420000 years BP (before present).

St Michael's Church itself (WSM 01945) is probably mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 (Thom and Thom 1982) although it was largely rebuilt in the 14th Century and the tower is thought to be of this date. The benefice of Upton Warren is mentioned in the Taxatio of Pope Nicholas IV 1291. The benefice included the church, valued at £8 13s 4d. The Chancel was rebuilt in 1724 and the Nave in 1798 (VCH III).

Earthworks are recorded in the immediate area of the church, land at The Barn House is recorded as having uncertain earthworks (WSM 23340) and earthworks South of Church (WSM 05447) may represent a flood boundary against the stream which forms the southern boundary.

Other buildings of note within the village include Hill Cottage (WSM 02101), a 17th Century brick and timber-framed house, the former Rectory now The Beeches (WSM 24874), The Barn House (WSM 31231) probably a merchant or yeoman's house and a brick barn complex at Rectory Farm (WSM 30630). A corn mill to the east of the church (WSM 10035) marked on the 1930 Ordnance Survey map of the area has since been demolished.

Ridge and Furrow is recorded in four areas around the village north and east of the village (WSM 03922, WSM 03923, WSM 03924, WSM 03925).

Medieval copper alloy coins were found by metal detecting in 1997 at Dodderhill (WSM34234). They were of Henry III, Edward III (Bury mint) and another of Edward III (Canterbury or Waterford mint).

The A38 which runs to the east of the village follows the line of the Roman road between Metchley and Worcester (WSM 15743).

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## 4. **Results**

### 4.1 **Structural analysis**

The recorded features recorded are shown in Fig 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

#### 4.1.1 **Phase 1 Natural deposits**

No natural deposits were observed in the watching brief.

#### 4.1.2 **Phase 2 Medieval/post medieval deposits**

A single context (1001) lay beneath the floorboards in the nave. This was an orange brown silty sand with frequent white mortar flecks, small-large sub-rounded pebbles and boulders, occasional rough carved green and red sandstone blocks and rubble. One sherd of buff tempered ware (Fabric 91) was recovered from this context and a fragment of brick, both 18<sup>th</sup> century.

On the north side of the nave, 4.2m from the east nave wall the top of a brick barrel vault was uncovered at a depth of 0.31m. It is constructed of handmade bricks (225x765x115mm) bonded by a light fawn lime mortar. The exposed portion of this was 1.2m wide. It lies beneath a memorial of the 1760s to the Parson family and it is likely that it is the vault of that family.

A brick structure (1003) was observed on either side of the quarry-tiled aisle of the church at a depth of 0.19m below ground surface. The bricks, measuring 70x110x220mm were bedded on grey sandstone blocks and were bonded by lime mortar and Portland cement.

A stone foundation structure was recorded in a water pipe trench some 2m south of the south west corner of the nave. It is a linear feature composed of light green sandstone blocks with no discernible bonding crossing the trench from east to west. At the top the feature is 0.63m wide, comprising two sandstone blocks but it is wider below this level.

### 5. **Synthesis**

The brick vault (1002) lies beneath a memorial to the Parson family and may well be the family vault. It was left *in situ* and will not be affected by the current programme of works.

The human bone recovered from beneath the pews was not articulated and did not represent a grave burial. In a church of many centuries usage a thin scatter of human bone may be expected in most layers and it is not considered that the few bones found were archaeologically significant.

The structure uncovered to the south of the nave (1007) may be the wall of another vault but its general scale and appearance are more suggestive of the foundation of a larger construction, possibly an earlier layout of the church itself. Both the nave and chancel were rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it is possible that they were moved at this time, which may account for the tower's location slightly south of the nave. If this were the case, the structure observed may be part of an earlier foundation of the nave.

### 6. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

*A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Stainburn Taylor and Michael Reardon architects at St Michael's Church, Upton Warren, Worcestershire (NGR ref 3931,2675; WSM 34758) in October 2005 and January 2006. As part of the repairs to suspended timber floors within the nave, the ground level in three areas within the nave were reduced by hand to allow the construction of new concrete foundations. A modern layer containing brick and mortar lay directly beneath the surface. A small quantity of human bone was identified within*



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*this context but was disarticulated and did not represent a burial. In the northern aisle, at the eastern end, next to the chancel the top of a brick barrel vault was exposed. It is constructed of hand made bricks bonded by a light fawn lime mortar. This lay beneath a memorial of the 1760s to the Parson family. It will not be affected by the current programme of works.*

*In a second phase of the watching brief carried out in January 2006, archaeological observation was undertaken during excavation for a water pipe to serve the new toilet at the north west corner of the church. A single trench was excavated adjacent to the western wall of the nave and extending south of the nave another 4.5m on the same line into the gravel path leading to the church door. At a distance of 2.4m from the wall of the church, a stone built structure was recorded crossing the trench from east to west. It was built of shaped blocks of green sandstone with no visible mortar. It is suggested that this may be the wall of a vault or the foundation of an earlier layout of the church itself. A single fragment of shaped red sandstone was recorded projecting from the section at the base of the trench slightly north of the stone feature.*

## 7. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 5 Context records AS1
- 3 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 2 Scale drawings
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum

Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury

Near Kidderminster

Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

## 8. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project Rev. Roger Antell, vicar of Upton Warren parish, Nigel Cartwright of Interclass Construction plc and Malcolm Jones of Stainburn, Taylor and Michael Reardon Architects.

## 9. **Personnel**

The fieldwork was led by Tom Vaughan and the report preparation by Tom Rogers. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Woodiwiss. Illustration was by Carolyn Hunt.

10. **Bibliography**

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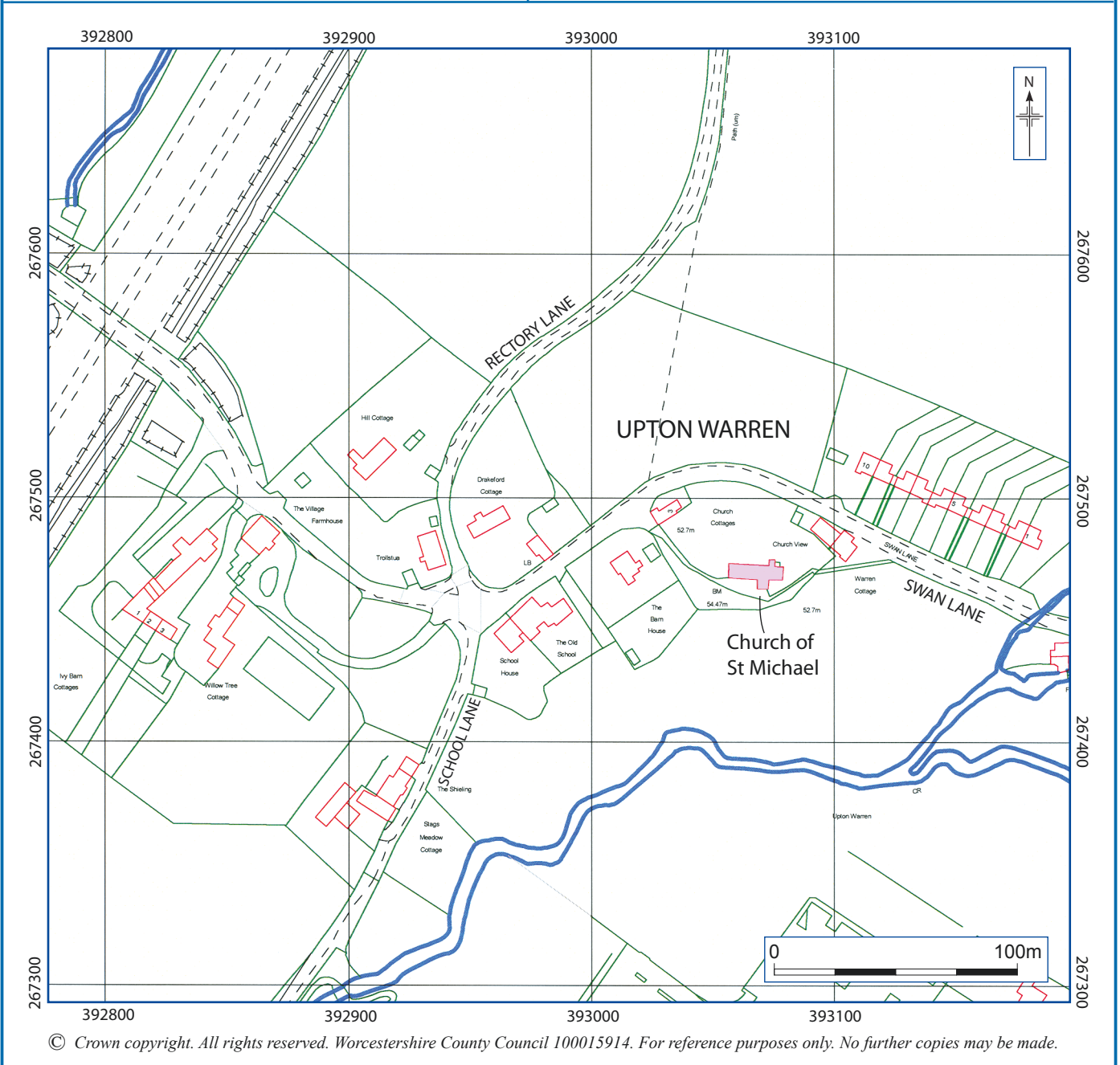
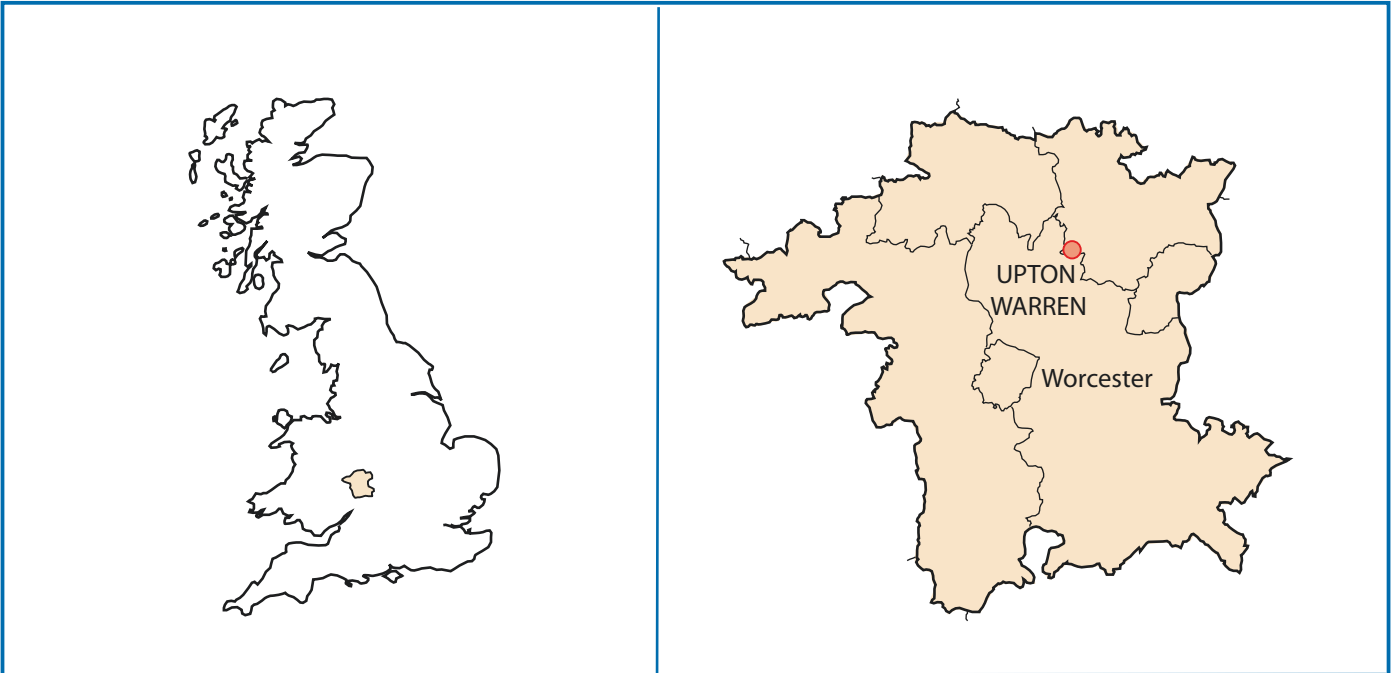
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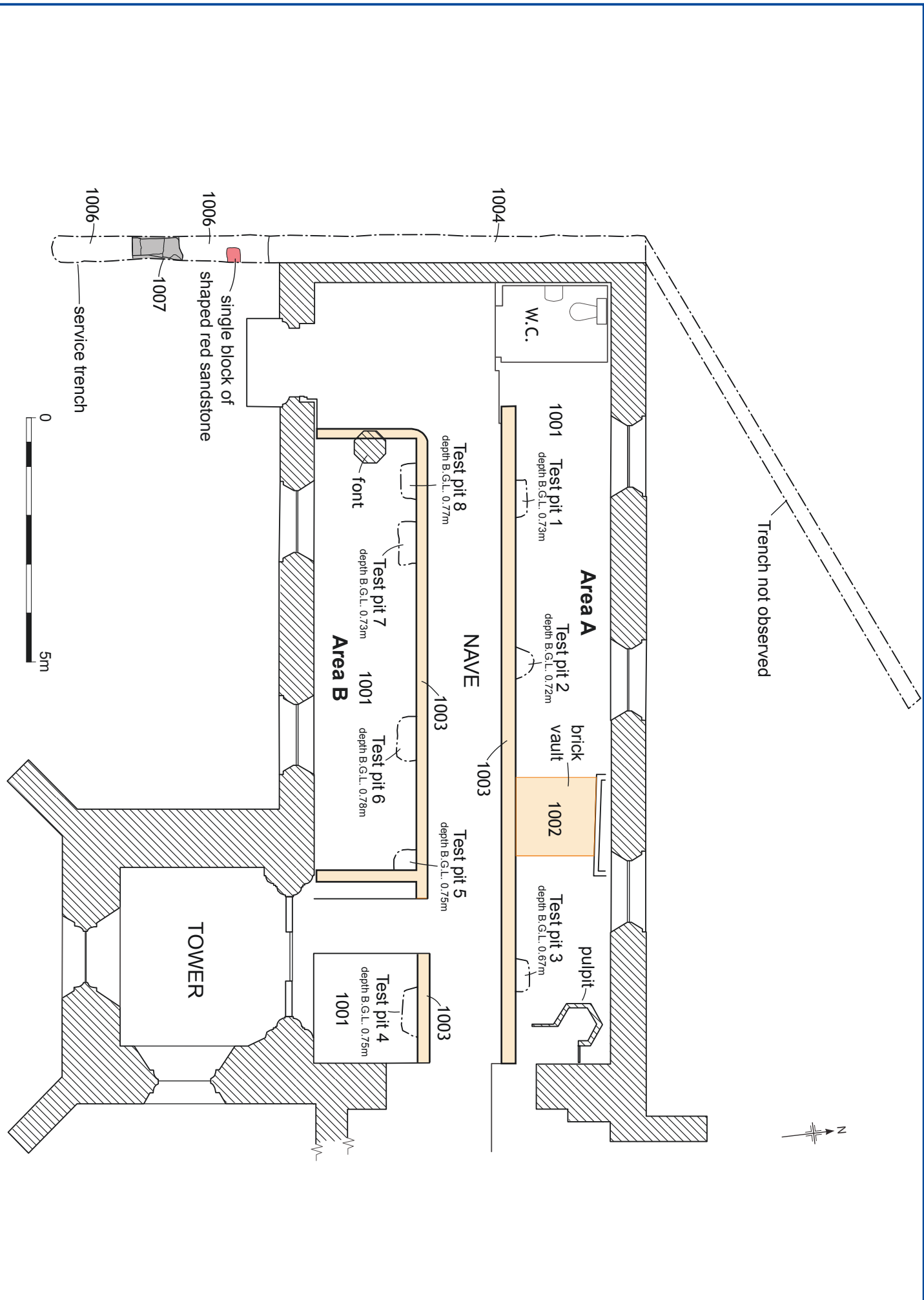
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Location of the site.

Figure 1



Location of trenches and test pits.

Figure 2



Plate 1. General shot of the church interior looking WSW



Plate 2. Test pit 4, looking north



Plate 3. Brick Vault in the north aisle of the nave, looking north



Plate 4. Possible foundation 1007 from the south



Plate 5. Service trench to the west of the nave viewed from the south



Plate 6. Shaped red sandstone block viewed from the south

## Appendix 1 Context descriptions

Context	Description	Depth below ground level)
1001	Orangey Fawn silty sand with frequent white mortar flecks, small-large sub-rounded pebbles & boulders, occasional rough carved green & red sandstone blocks & rubble, handmade brick. One sherd of buff tempered ware recovered from this context and a fragment of brick, both 18 <sup>th</sup> century.	0m
1002	Brick barrel vault, below 1760 memorial, handmade sandy brick w/ small pebbles, 225x765x115mm, friable light fawn mortar with extensive white chalk flecks, within 1001	0.31m
1003	Brick foundations either side of quarry tile aisle (not bonded), hard bricks 70x110x220mm, mortar as 1002 & Portland cement above, at 0.19m below ground surface, bedded on grey sandstone blocks, sealed by 1001.	0.19m
1004	Loose dark brown/grey silt with frequent rounded pebbles, brick, tile and modern drainage pipe fragments and occasional lime mortar.	0m – 0.56m
1005	Modern imported gravel forming path to the church door	0m – 0.04m
1006	Loose mid brown sandy silt with frequent rounded and sub-rounded stones and small bone fragments, moderate brick and tile fragments and occasional charcoal.	0.04m – 0.84m
1007	Stone wall/foundation 0.84m high (though not fully exposed in trench), comprised of green sandstone shaped blocks.	0.24m – 0.84m