

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF
AT
ST MARY'S CHURCH, KEMPSEY,
WORCESTERSHIRE

Sarah Phear

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Worcestershire County Council

Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,
Worcestershire County Council,
Woodbury,

University of Worcester,
Henwick Grove,
Worcester WR2 6AJ



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Project P2722
Report 1397
WSM 35052

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An archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcestershire

Sarah Phear

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcestershire. It was undertaken on behalf of Stainburn Taylor Architects and their client, the Parochial Church Council, who were excavating a trench for a gas pipe that extends through the churchyard. The project aimed to observe and record any significant archaeological deposits exposed in the trench. No deposits could be associated with the Iron Age or Roman periods although remains of these types have been recovered at sites nearby. Church foundations possibly dating to the 15th Century were partially exposed and recorded.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Mary's Church (NGR SO8483 4906) Kempsey, Worcestershire (Fig 1) on behalf of Stainburn Taylor Architects and their client the Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Church. The client intended to excavate a trench for a gas pipe through the churchyard for which a faculty was applied for and the watching brief was made a condition as a site of archaeological interest was affected (WSM02113).

1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999).

A brief was not prepared for this project, though the project conforms to the requirements of standard briefs prepared by Worcestershire County Council and from which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2005).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the archaeological watching brief are to observe and record any significant archaeological deposits exposed by the trench. Such deposits are likely to be related to the medieval church or the remains of earlier periods.

Methods

1.4 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER) Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). In addition the sources cited in the bibliography.

1.5 Fieldwork methodology

1.5.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2005b). As a result of the documentary search, adjustments were made to the fieldwork strategy. Observation and recording of archaeological deposits were to be restricted to areas of ground disturbance associated with the excavation of the trench following the progress of the construction team. As the line of the trench is understood to follow an earlier disturbance, some sections of the trench will not be observed.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 24 and 25 January 2005. The site reference number and site code is WSM 35052.

One trench, amounting to just over 70m long, 0.3m wide and 0.6-0.7m deep was excavated. The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2.

A small tracked excavator opened the trench with limited archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Deposits were recorded according to

standard Service practice (CAS 1995). A photographic and drawn record was made of the area around and within the trench.

1.5.2 **Structural analysis**

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

1.6 **Artefact methodology**

1.6.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 2). This in principal determines that all finds, of whatever date, must be collected. However, in this case no artefacts were recovered.

1.7 **Environmental archaeology methodology**

1.7.1 **Sampling policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). However, in this case no environmental sampling took place.

1.8 **The methods in retrospect**

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

2. **Topographical and archaeological context**

Lying approximately 5 km south of Worcester City, Kempsey is situated on the gravel river terrace of the east bank of the River Severn. The soils in the area are weakly structured, slightly stony sandy loams that grade to porous brownish sub-soils (Beard *et al*, 1986).

St Mary's Church is located within an Iron Age promontory (HWCM 2113) with Roman remains close by – a Roman inscribed milestone (HWCM 2121) and a scatter of pottery (HWCM 2125). In addition, the alleged location of the medieval bishops palace (HWCM 7192) is to the west of the site. Thus, potentially Iron Age, Roman, and/or medieval deposits could be exposed in the watching brief.

St Mary's Church has a long history of construction and alteration. During the 12th century the church was formed from an aisleless cruciform building. During the 13th to 14th centuries additions were added to the church including the chancel, windows, aisles and arcades. The south and north transepts required extensive repairs in the 15th century, and both transepts were subsequently rebuilt. At the end of the century the west tower was also rebuilt and heightened. By the 18th century the church was in dire need of repairs, and the musicians gallery built in 1759. In addition several internal alterations occurred during the Victorian period.

In 1996 an archaeological watching brief took place at St Mary's Church owing to the construction of new services to the church (Wichbold 1996). This required the excavation of a trench from the west end of the south aisle, around the tower, to a point on Church Street. Within the church, a deposit was uncovered that had been disturbed by the burial of one adult human. No dating material was recovered. Outside the church several brown loamy deposits were identified and two burials. The loamy deposits contained tiles, pottery, and some human

bone. However, these finds are from deposits that have been disturbed by burials and are therefore unstratified.

Other excavations in the area have not produced significant findings. At 15 Old South Rd residual medieval pottery, flint flakes, and a single Roman pottery sherd were recovered (WSM 31960; Goad *et al* 2003). At Lyf's Lane (to the north-east of the church) a soil layer and pit of possibly Roman or medieval date were uncovered during an evaluation (WSM 29915; Fagan 1993). At 2 Lanes End a watching brief identified a former air-raid shelter (WSM 27104; Cook 1993).

3. **Results**

3.1 **Structural analysis**

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

No natural deposits were exposed in the watching brief, and the excavation did not reveal any Iron Age or Roman deposits.

While no direct dating evidence was found for the buttress foundations (context 104 and 105), historical records indicate that the south transept was rebuilt in the 15th century and therefore the buttress foundations likely date to the period.

The majority of deposits exposed in the watching brief are disturbed. Those contexts to the south and west of the church (context 102 and 103) have been disturbed by burials (including modern), rebuilding activities, and alterations to the church. The topsoil (101) and subsoil (102) exposed to the northwest of the church have likewise undergone disturbance from landscaping activities. The human remains recovered in these deposits have no associated dating material and therefore the age of the burials is unknown.

4. **Synthesis**

The buttress stones uncovered in the east end of the trench form part of the foundations for the south transept of the church. Therefore it is likely that the buttress stones exposed in the watching brief date to the 15th century. Whether they were newly hewn stones or re-used/recycled cannot be discerned.

It is not known exactly how old the church cemetery is. The majority of the site immediately adjacent to the south and south-west side of the church is formed of grave plots, while the north and north-west is landscaped lawn. The trench excavated in the watching brief extends through both environments around the church and therefore had the potential to expose human burials. While partial remains from one-two individuals were recovered (one skull and some arm bones), human remains were rare. A lack of associated dating evidence means an exact date for the burials cannot be determined, though the remains exhibit some traits associated with christian burials.

The nature of the top- and sub-soils indicate a high level of disturbance to the area surrounding the south and west sides of the church. As a result the remaining 0.6-0.7m of soil in the area of the site situated immediately around this extent of the church is unlikely to yield material of archaeological significance. As the lawn area on the north-west and north sides of the church has also been landscaped and likely disturbed during church repairs, it is unlikely that the top 0.5-0.6m of soil will contain remains of archaeological significance. Deposits excavated to a greater depth in the future may yield Roman and /or Iron Age material.

5. **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.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcestershire (NGR ref SO849491). It was undertaken on behalf of Stainburn Taylor Architects and client the Parochial Church Council, who were excavating a trench for a gas pipe through the churchyard. The project aimed to observe and record any significant archaeological deposits exposed in the trench. No deposits could be associated with the Iron Age or Roman periods although remains of these types have been recovered at sites nearby. Church foundations possibly associated with the south transept were partially exposed. Records suggest the foundations may have been laid in the 15th Century.

6. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

2	Fieldwork progress records AS2
1	Photographic records AS3
7	Abbreviated context records AS40
1	Scale drawings
1	CD with digital photographs

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum

Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury

Near Kidderminster

Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

7. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, the Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Church, Stainburn Taylor Architects, and Worcestershire County Council.

8. **Personnel**

The report preparation was undertaken by Sarah Phear. Field work was conducted by Jon Milward. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Woodiwiss. The illustrations were compiled by Carolyn Hunt.

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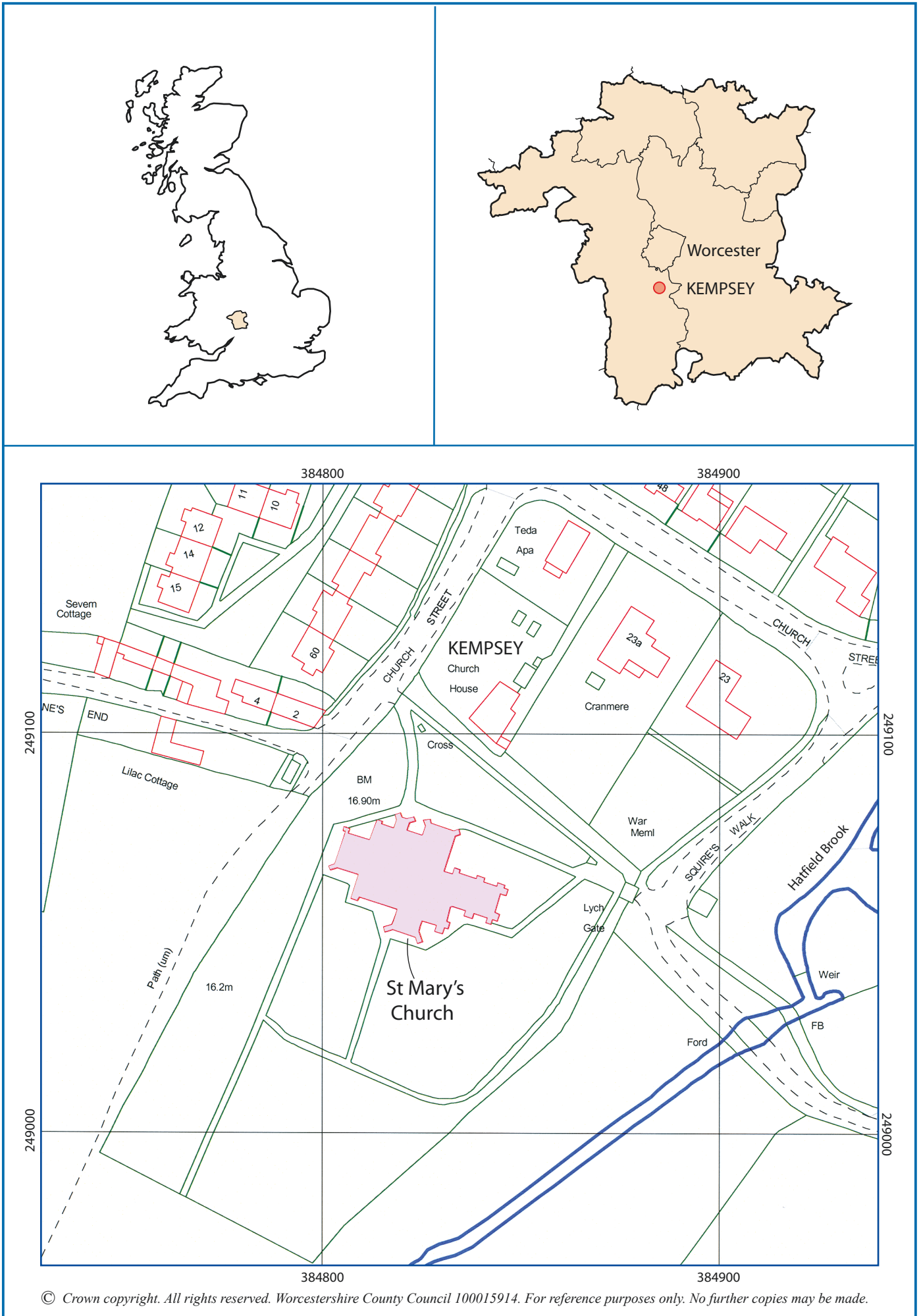
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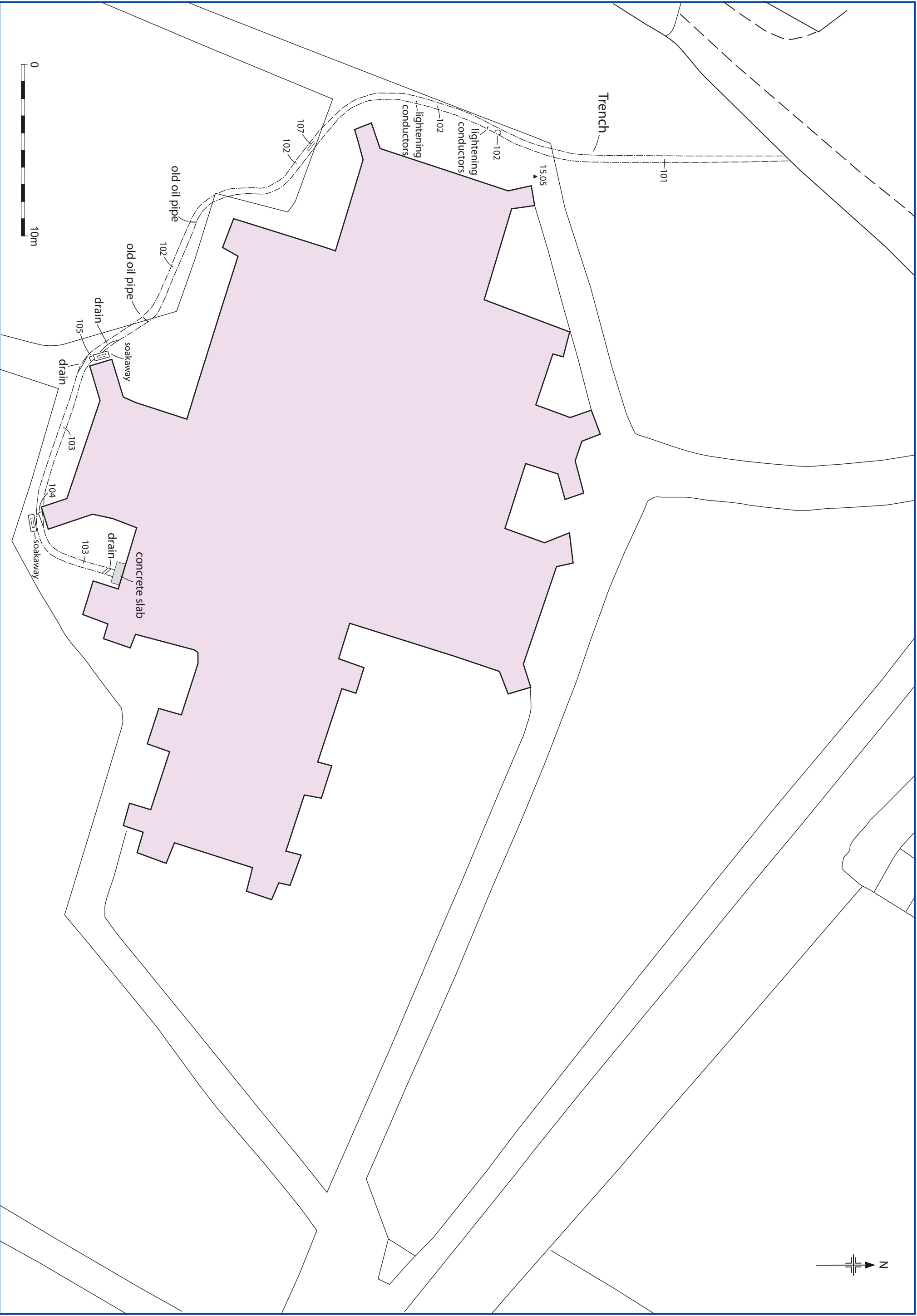
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Location of St Mary's Church.

Figure 1



Trench location plan



Plate 1 Northwest section of the trench illustrating the landscaped lawn.



Plate 2 Disarticulated arm bones in trench, facing east.



Plate 3 Skull 106 exposed in the trench, facing east.



Plate 4 The trench, facing east. Illustrates the close proximity to modern cremation burials.



Plate 5 South transept buttress foundation stones 105, facing north.



Plate 6 South transept buttress foundation stone 104, facing north.

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 70m Width: 0.3m Depth: 0.6-0.7m

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Finds number	Unstratified finds	
101	Topsoil	Dark grey-brown friable fine silty loam. Abundant rootlets – very humic. Occasional small sub-rounded stones. Greater depth in north-west corner of church due to landscaping activity in the churchyard.	0-0.15m
102	Subsoil	Mid grey-brown friable sandy loam. Occasional small-medium sub-angular sandstones and disarticulated human bone. Old breaks on the bones indicate previous disturbance to the graves.	0.15-0.5m
103	Deposit	Heterogeneous mixed clay with patches of context 102. Abundant small-medium pebbles. Occasional small-large sandstone fragments. Located close to the church. Comprised of fill of drain trench and possible debris associated with church construction.	0.1-0.6m
104	Buttress foundation	Greenish sandstone with lime mortar adhered to surface, 0.09 x 0.15 x 0.4m. Part of foundation for buttress on west side of church. No visible cut. Surrounded by context 103.	0.3-0.45m
105	Buttress foundation	Two courses of greenish sandstone with lime mortar adhered to surface, 0.3 x 0.17 x 0.23m. No visible cut. Surrounded by context 103.	0.3-0.6m
106	Human skull	Articulated, east west oriented undisturbed burial. Skull lying on right side facing southwest. No grave cut observed.	0.55-0.6m
107	Human bone	Disarticulated arm bones – distal humerus, ulna and some carpels present (left insitu).	0.6-0.63m