

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF AT  
PERSHORE ABBEY, HOLY  
CROSS, PERSHORE,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Tom Vaughan

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

18<sup>th</sup> May 2006

© Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,  
Worcestershire County Council

Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,  
Worcestershire County Council,  
Woodbury,  
University of Worcester,  
Henwick Grove,  
Worcester WR2 6AJ



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project 2822  
Report 1439  
WSM 35079



---

## Archaeological watching brief at Pershore Abbey, Holy Cross, Pershore, Worcestershire

**Tom Vaughan**

---

### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Robert Kilgour & Associates
<i>Site address</i>	St Johns / north-east Chapel, Pershore Abbey, Holy Cross, Pershore, Worcestershire SO 94803 45810
<i>National Grid reference</i>	WSM 35079
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	Church Faculty
<i>Planning authority</i>	n/a
<i>reference</i>	
<i>Brief</i>	Haywood and Associates letter dated 12 <sup>th</sup> October 2005
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS letter dated 19 <sup>th</sup> October 2005
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999
<i>Previous archaeological work on the site</i>	

Investigations to the south of the surviving abbey building in 1929-30 identified the layout of the abbatial buildings and the abbey nave (Andrews 1928). In 1984 limited excavations were undertaken around the central tower, which identified structural remains including a rubble foundation apparently predating the Norman south-western crossing tower (Roberts 1985). Evaluation trenches opened in 1997 revealed deposits pre-dating the Norman nave and the outline of the west end of the nave was finally recorded (Napthan 1997). Extensive excavations inside the church in 2000 distinguished 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century phases of construction (Blockley 2000). Further excavation in the same year of the nave identified 11<sup>th</sup> century remains (Dalwood *et al* 2000).

Most recently a watching brief undertaken by the Service in 2005 of stabilisation works at the north-east corner of the vestry identified structural remains of the 12<sup>th</sup> century north transept, at least two phases of internal floor surfacing and a truncated burial predating this activity (Sworn 2005).

The north-east, or St Johns chapel is thought to date from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, possibly *c* 1210, when the east end of the abbey underwent alterations which included the construction of the Lady Chapel. It is unclear if there was an earlier structure at this point (VCH IV, 159).

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

Pershore itself has been the subject of a survey undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Dalwood 1996) and contains a full summary of previous archaeological work and the present state of knowledge in the town.

---

### Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

---

## Methods

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER Sources cited by the HER 1 <sup>st</sup> edition 1885 Ordnance Survey 25" sheet
Date(s) of fieldwork	10 <sup>th</sup> and 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2005
Area of site	c 3.9m <sup>2</sup>
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Foundations      length 3.99m width 1.85m depth 0.23-0.66m

The initial test pit was opened at the corner of the north-east, St Johns chapel on 10<sup>th</sup> October and extended to the north and south-east, to assess the state of the foundations of the north-east chapel and the surrounding deposits. This was then back filled and a slightly smaller area was subsequently re-excavated on the 31<sup>st</sup> October. The modern ground surface is at approximately 21.25m AOD.

No artefacts predating the modern period were recovered during the project. All human bone was retained on site and either reburied in-situ or retained to be reinterred once the groundworks were completed.

### *Access to or visibility of deposits*

Observation of the excavated area was undertaken during and after hand excavation. The exposed trench sections and base were then recorded to identify archaeological deposits.

### *Statement of confidence*

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

## Deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface
100	Drain	Stone surface drain around abbey, joining with deep brick lined drain at corner; bedded on concrete; overlying 103.	0.00-0.16m
101	Foundation	Concreted sandstone rubble and courses of rough sandstone blocks; overlying 102; below 100 and 114?	0.14-0.56m
102	Subsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy loam with redeposited concreted sandstone rubble and disarticulated human bone; below 101.	0.49m +
103	Topsoil	Turfed mid-dark brown sandy loam with frequent disarticulated redeposited human bone.	0.00->0.65m
104	Surface	Modern concrete capping around building; overlying 100 and 101.	0.00-c 0.08m
105	Skeleton	Ribs and clavicle, articulated? Left in-situ.	c      0.17- 0.22m
106	Grave cut	Hypothetical cut; filled by 105 and 107. Not fully excavated.	c      0.17- 0.22m
107	Backfill	Mid-dark brown sandy loam; fill of 106; over 105;	c      0.17-

		same as 103.	0.22m
108	Skeleton	Thorax and pelvis; truncated to ESE; excavated and retained on site for reinterment.	c 0.40-0.60m
109	Grave cut	Hypothetical cut; truncated to WSW; aligned approximately ENE/WSW; filled by 108 and 110.	c 0.40-0.60m
110	Backfill	Mid-dark brown sandy loam with frequent disarticulated redeposited bone; truncated to ESE; fill of 109; of 108; same as 103.	c 0.40-0.60m
111	Skeleton	Skull, humerus and rib; within 112, below 113. Left in-situ.	0.60m +
112	Grave cut	Hypothetical cut; filled by 111 and 113. Not fully excavated.	0.60m +
113	Backfill	Mid-dark brown sandy loam with frequent disarticulated redeposited bone; fill of 112, overlying 111.	0.60m +
114	Foundation	Light yellow limestone mortar base of foundation; aligned approximately north-south; truncated by 117; sealed by 103; part of 101?	0.25m +
115	Natural	Gravelly sand.	c 0.65m +
116	Skeleton	Disturbed ribs, tibia and vertebrae, within 117, below 118. Left in-situ.	c 0.22m +
117	Grave cut	Aligned approximately ENE/WSW; truncates 114; filled by 116 and 118. Not fully excavated.	c 0.22m +
118	Backfill	Mid-dark brown sandy loam with frequent disarticulated redeposited bone; fill of 116, overlying 116.	c 0.22m +

## Results and discussion

Rough concreted sandstone rubble foundations, 101, were noted, extending out to 0.36m from the abbey wall, to a depth of c 0.56m below the existing ground surface. Although no artefacts were recovered, it is conjectured that this material represents the original foundation of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century chapel. Another possible foundation course, 114, was noted on a different, north-south alignment, out from the corner of the chapel. It appeared to comprise a similar material as the main foundations, indicating that it is of comparable date.

Four discrete burials were recorded, all aligned roughly east-west. In addition a quantity of redeposited and disarticulated bone was noted within the soil generally. The inhumations ranged in depth from between 0.17 - 0.60m below the present ground surface. The three toward the east side of the excavated area appeared to be on ENE/WSW alignments and were intercut. Although it was generally not possible to identify the actual grave cuts, it would appear that the deepest, 111, was in fact the latest as it clearly truncated burial 108, removing the left arm and probably also removing the right arm of uppermost burial 105. Burial 108 had also been decapitated by the chapel foundations, which provides a secure *terminus post quem*. Burial 116, on the west side, lay on a slightly different NE/SW alignment and cut through the upper foundation 114, again associated with the north-east chapel, providing a *terminus ante quem* for this interment.

As all of the human bone was either left *in situ* or retained on site for reburial, no osteological analysis was undertaken. Therefore the age and sex of the individuals was not determined, although observation of their size indicated that they were all adults.

## Conclusions

It is clear that burial within this portion of the churchyard was undertaken both prior to and after the construction of the chapel in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally the density of interments is high, such that later burials appear to have frequently cut earlier ones, resulting in truncation of articulated remains, and the redeposition of stray bones throughout the general soil.

The foundation courses appear to relate to the existing chapel, which was built in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The north-south foundation is contemporary and probably represents the foundation for a buttress.

---

## 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 on behalf of Robert Kilgour and Associates at Pershore Abbey, Holy Cross, Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 94803 45810; HER ref WSM 35079). A hand-dug test pit was monitored at the corner of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century north-east, St Johns chapel. This revealed four inhumations with associated disarticulated bone, the concreted sandstone rubble foundation course of the chapel and a further foundation for a possible buttress or adjacent structure. Two of the burials pre-dated the chapel foundations and one appeared to post-date the discrete foundation course. No dateable artefacts were recovered during the investigation, and all human bone was retained on site either for immediate reburial *in situ* or reinterment at the end of works. No osteological analysis was undertaken although all of the identified individuals appeared to be adults.

---

## Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	2
Photographic records AS3	1
Digital photographs	34
Drawing number catalogues AS4	1
Drawings	10
Context number catalogues AS5	1
Computer disks	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Worcestershire County Museum Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury Near Kidderminster Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
telephone	01299 250416

---

---

## Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Robert Kilgour (Robert Kilgour and Associates), Clive Heywood (Frank W Haywood and Associates), Ron Shoesmith (Pershore Abbey Archaeologist) and Sarah Wilson (Church Warden).

---

## Personnel

The fieldwork was undertaken by Elizabeth Pearson. Tom Vaughan created the archive and wrote the report. The illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Woodiwiss.

---

## Bibliography

Andrews, F B, 1928 (1931) Pershore Abbey, Worcestershire: report on the excavations at the site of the abbatial buildings and nave 1929-30, *Trans Birmingham Archaeol Soc*, 53, 196-204

Blockley, K, 2000 Pershore Abbey: excavations in the choir, crossing and transepts 1996, *Trans Worcestershire Archaeol Soc*, 17, 1-52

CAS 1995 (as amended) *Manual of Service practice: fieldwork recording manual*, County Archaeological Service, Hereford and Worcester County Council, report, **399**

Dalwood, H C, 1996 *Archaeological assessment of Pershore, Hereford and Worcester*, County Archaeological Service, Worcestershire County Council, report **335**

Dalwood, H, Napthan, M, Pearson, E, and Ratkai, S, 2000 Pershore Abbey: excavations on the site of the nave, 1996-7, *Trans Worcestershire Archaeol Soc*, 17, 53-71

Garratt-Frost, S, 1992 The Law and Burial Archaeology, Institute of Field Archaeologists Technical Paper number **11**

IFA, 1999 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

McKinley, J I and Roberts, C, 1993 *Excavation and post-excavation treatment of cremated and inhumed human remains*, Institute of Field Archaeologists Technical Paper number **13**

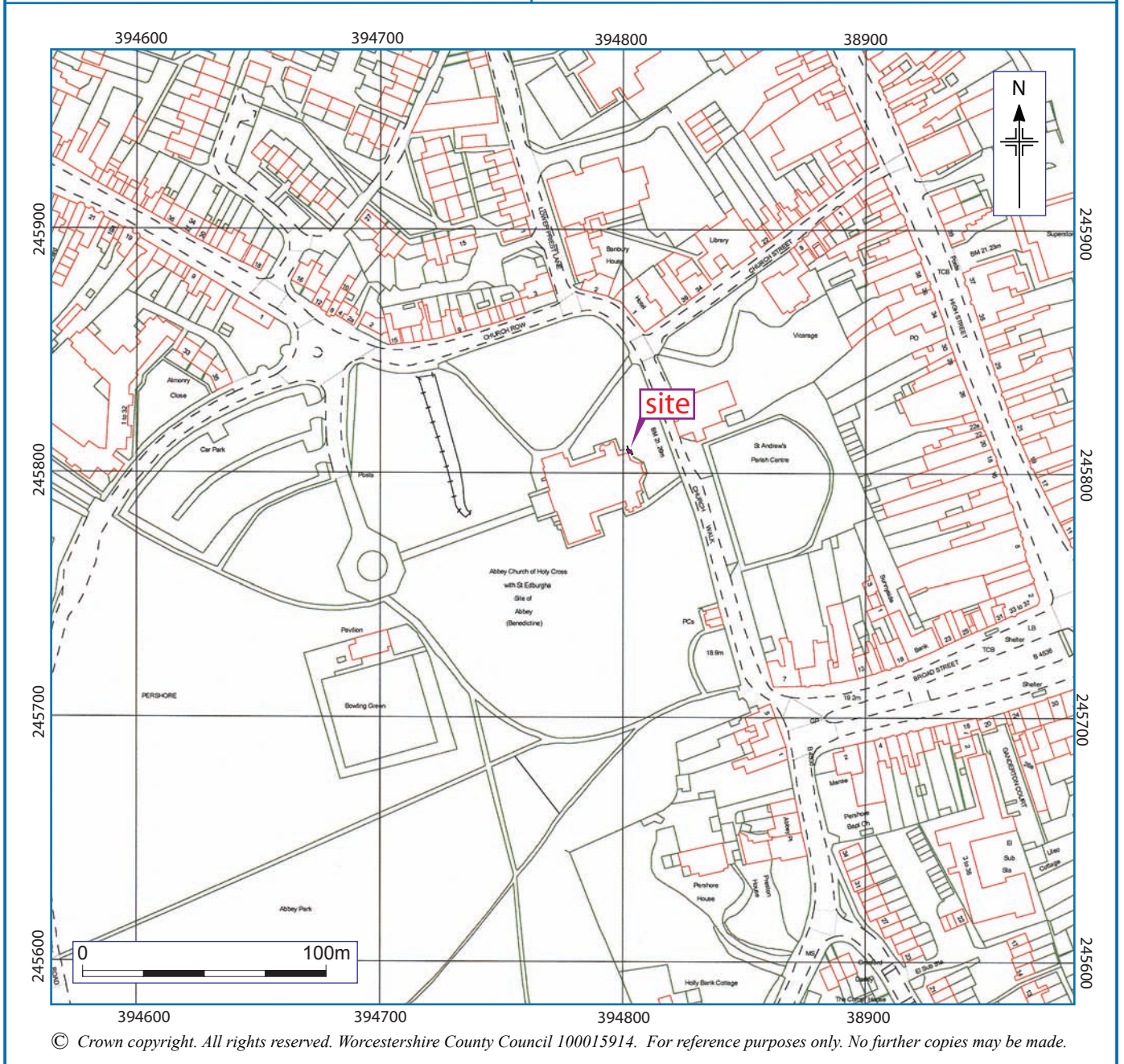
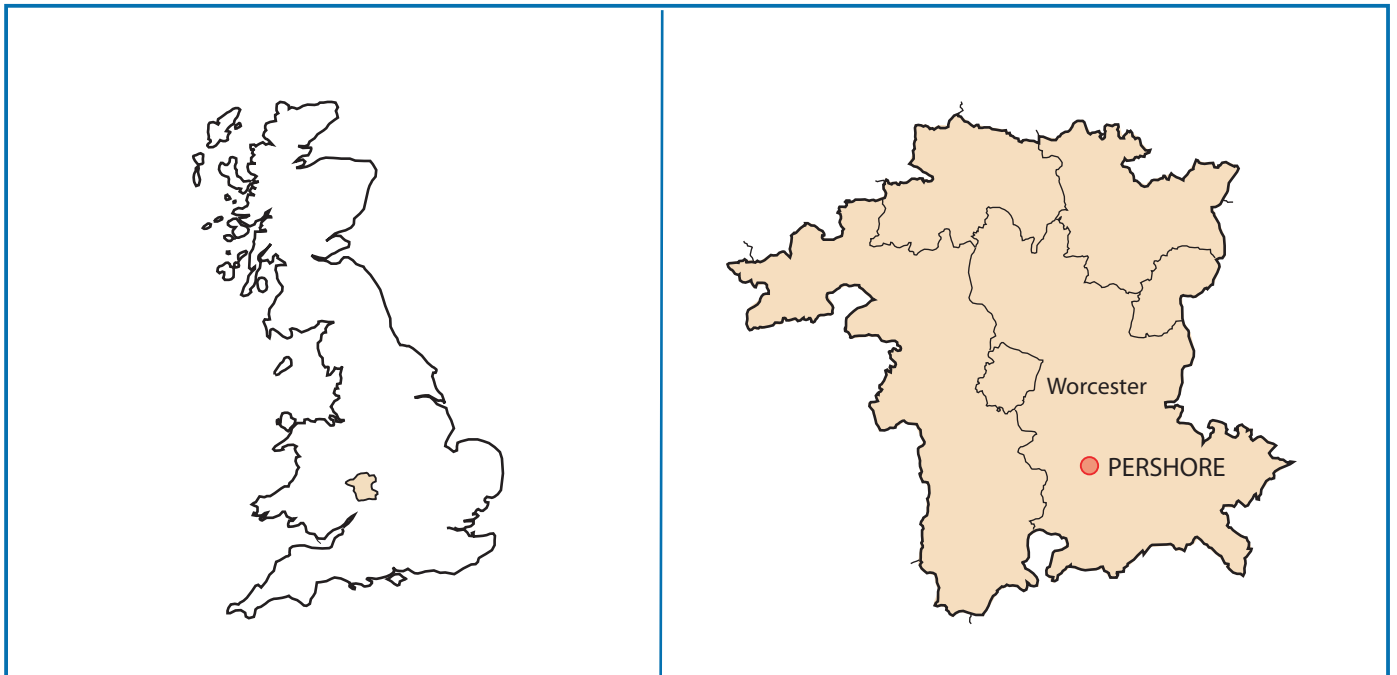
Napthan, M, Pearson, E, and Ratkai, S, 1997 *Evaluation at the west end of Pershore Abbey, Pershore*, Hereford and Worcester County Archaeological Service internal report, **616**

Roberts, J, 1985 *Pershore Abbey: Excavations adjacent to the church, October and November 1984*, Hereford and Worcester County Archaeological Service internal report

Sworn, S J, 2005 *Archaeological watching brief at Pershore Abbey, Worcestershire*, Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished report **1348**

VCH IV, Page, W (ed), 1971 *Victoria History of the County of Worcestershire*, **IV**

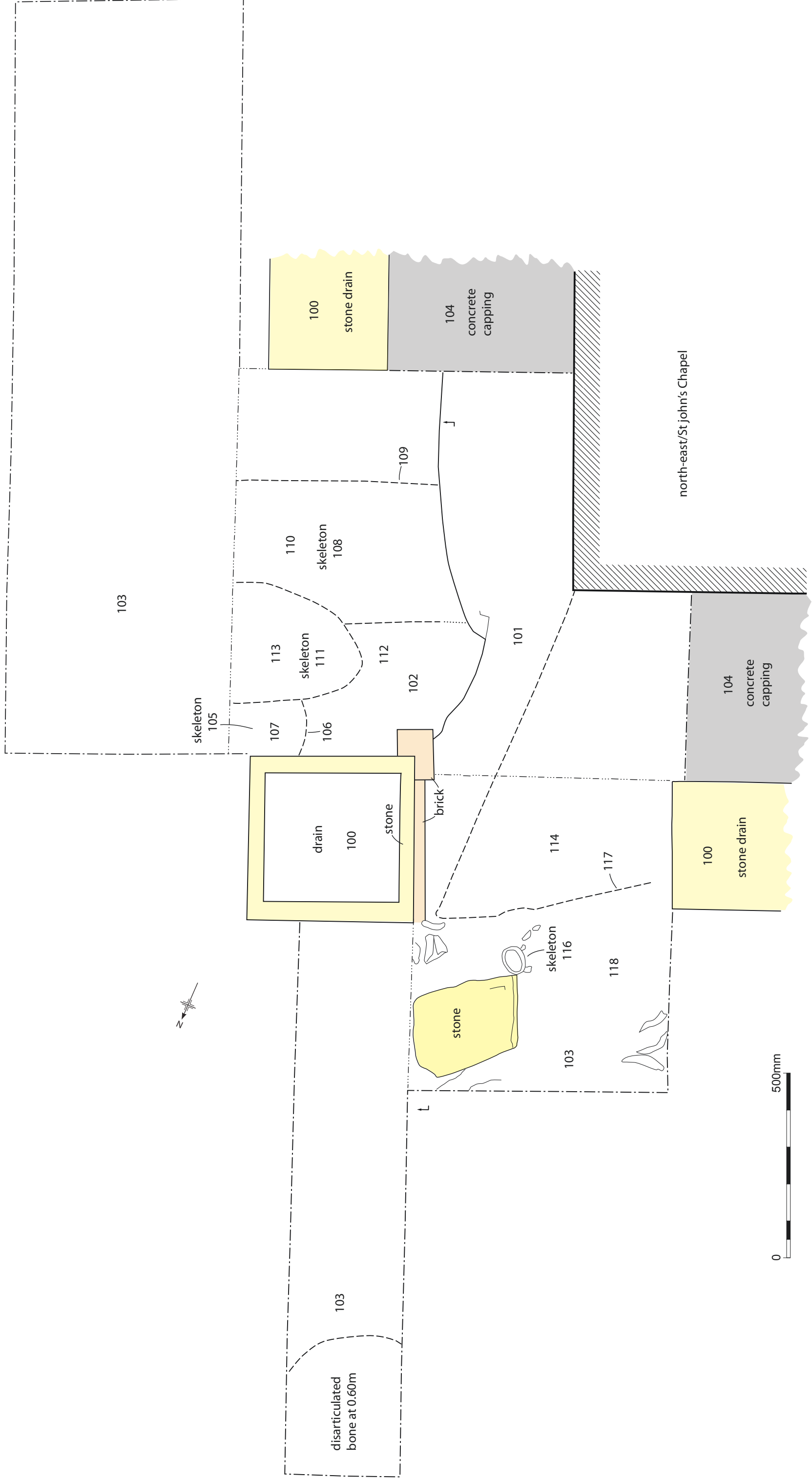
---



Location of the site.

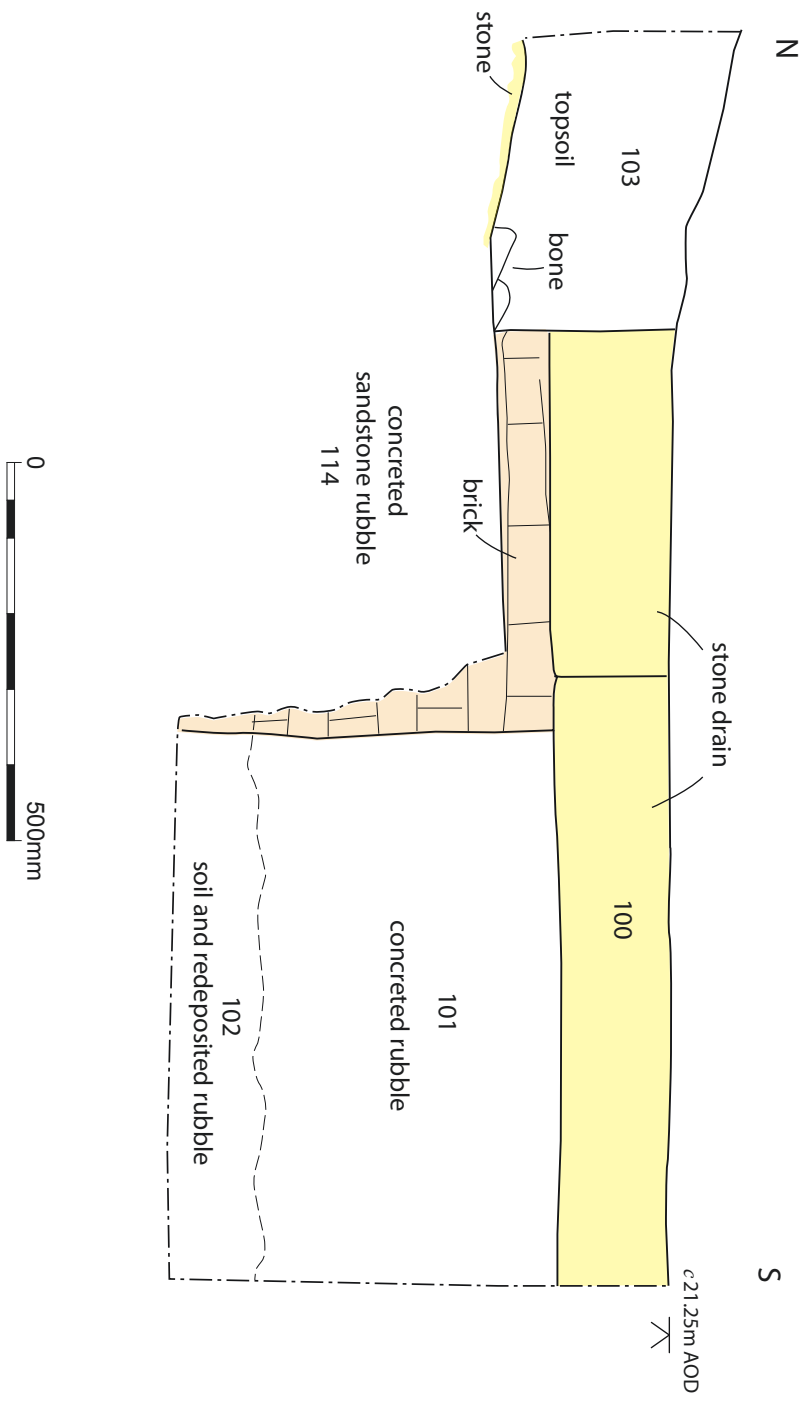
Figure 1





Trench plan

Figure 2



WEST-FACING SECTION

West-facing section

Figure 3

**Plates**



1. Location of excavation area outside north-east St Johns chapel, view south-west



2. Initial area opened on 10<sup>th</sup> October, with foundations 101 and 114, and general soil layer 102 with redeposited bone visible, view SSE





3. North extension of initial area with burial 116 truncating foundation 114, view SSE



4. Extent of area opened on 31<sup>st</sup> October, view WSW





5. Burial 105 at c 0.17m depth, left *in situ*, view ENE



6. Excavation of burial 108 at c 0.40m depth, with associated disarticulated bone, view ENE



6. Burial 111 at c 0.60m depth, left *in situ*, view ENE