

Archaeological watching brief at The Church of St Lawrence Evesham, Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for Oliver Architecture Ltd

March 2021



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CHURCH OF ST LAWRENCE EVESHAM WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological watching brief report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name: Church of St Lawrence, Evesham
Local planning authority: Wychavon District Council
Planning reference: 20/02238/LB
Central NGR: SP 03690 43676
Commissioning client: Oliver Architecture
WA Project number: P5995
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An archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Lawrence, Evesham, Worcestershire

By Elizabeth Connolly and Tim Cornah

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Church of St Lawrence, Evesham, Worcestershire (NGR SP 03690 43676). It was commissioned by Oliver Architecture Ltd on behalf of the Churches Conservation Trust, in advance of proposed repairs to the church tower. An application for listed building consent has been submitted to Wychavon District Council and an application for a faculty for the works has been granted.

The excavation of test pits and trenches adjacent to the church building revealed evidence of modern drainage to deal with the run off from the church roof. Layers of rubble and gravel mixed with pottery, glass and some fragments of disarticulated human bone are interpreted a combination of waste from refurbishments to the church and graveyard soil. Analysis of the pottery suggested a likely 18th century or early 19th century, with individual sherds spanning the 17th to 19th century. It is probable that this reflects a period of known dereliction after a roof collapse in the 18th century before a programme of remodelling in the 1830s.

No grave cuts or other features were identified during the watching brief. The disarticulated human bone is likely to be the result of the long use of the graveyard and multiple episodes of grave digging and, as such, is normal for this setting. A further architectural detail of the tower was exposed in the form of a chamfer at its base, mirroring those on its upper stages.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in December 2020 at The Church of St Lawrence, Evesham, Worcestershire (NGR SP 03690 43676). This comprised observation of six hand dug test pits and two trenches part of ground reduction prior to the construction of proposed scaffolding for the conservation and repair of the facing material to the tower.

The project was commissioned by Oliver Architecture on behalf of the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT). The stone facing of the tower is in a state of disrepair due to the poor quality of the Lias building stone and the CCT have commissioned Oliver Architecture to carry out the repairs using lime mortar and matching stonework.

An application for listed building consent has been submitted to Wychavon District Council (ref 20/02238/LB) and an application for a faculty for the works has also been granted (planning reference 20/02238/LB).

The watching brief conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in the *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The Church of St Lawrence is located in the south-east of the town of Evesham, in the precinct of the Abbey of Evesham.

The church is surrounded by a grassy churchyard bounded by footpaths with some residential development and allotments to the south.

The test pits were excavated around the west tower of the church in a grassy area with one pit close to a footpath which runs immediately west of the tower. Subsequent areas of ground reduction were excavated to the south and north sides of the tower.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of Blue Lias Formation and Charmouth Mudstone Formation, overlain by superficial deposits of the New Inn Sand and Gravel Member (BGS 2021).

2 Archaeological and historical background

St. Lawrence's Church, Evesham (NHLE 1081352) is a Grade II* listed building, surrounded to the east and south by the Scheduled remains of the precinct of the abbey of Evesham (NHLE no. 1005297). The church has been redundant since 1978 and is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT).

From its foundation in 701, Evesham Abbey alternated between monastic and collegiate foundation, finally becoming a Benedictine Abbey in 989 that lasted until its dissolution in 1539.

The church of St Lawrence was first mentioned in 1195 but was rebuilt c.1295 and c.1540. One of the two town centre churches which stand within the precinct of Evesham Abbey (the other is All Saints). This duality has never been fully explained, although All Saints' appears to have been the parish church for the east part of the town, St Lawrence's for the west. Following dereliction, it was restored in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

3 Project aims

The aims of the watching brief are to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the Client's groundworks.

4 Project methodology

Monitoring of the test pits was undertaken on 7th December 2020, with monitoring of the two trenches was undertaken on the 11th and 12th of January 2021. The locations of these elements are indicated in Figure 2.

Observation of test pits was undertaken during and after hand excavation, with the trenches machine excavated. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

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

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Worcestershire County Museum.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Test pits

Six test pits were hand excavated in the vicinity of the west tower of the Church of St Lawrence. These were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.40m – natural levels were not reached. Beneath a layer of black silty topsoil which measured about 0.2m deep across the area, a rubble layer containing brick, metal, pottery as well as some fragments of disarticulated human bone, was recorded. In two pits immediately adjacent to the church building (Test Pits 2 and 4), modern ceramic drainage pipes were recorded. In Test Pit 3 a dense gravel layer is probably associated with the adjacent footpath.

Details of the test pits excavated and the contexts recorded are presented in Table 1 below.

5.1.1 Test pit and Context description table

Test Pit No.	Dimensions in plan	Max Depth	Description
1	0.5m by 0.5m	0.25m	Topsoil (TP100), approx. 0.20m deep Brick/lime rubble (TP101), excavated to about 0.5m. Contained clay pipe stems.
2	1.3m (N-S) by 0.4m (E-W)	0.30m	Topsoil (TP200) Ceramic drainage pipe (TP201) Rubble/brick layer (TP202)
3	0.45m (E-W) by 0.55m (N-S)	0.25m	Topsoil (TP300) Compact gravel/concrete (TP301) possibly associated with adjacent pathway

Test Pit No.	Dimensions in plan	Max Depth	Description
4	0.8m (E-W) by 0.5m (N-S)	c 0.4m	Topsoil (TP400) Drainage pipe (TP401) Mixed gravel/rubble (TP402)
5	0.6m (E-W) by 0.4m (N-S)	0.42m	Topsoil (TP500) Loose mixed gravel (TP501) containing modern pottery, metal and possibly human bone (reburied)
6	0.6m (E-W) by 0.4m (N-S)	0.4m	Topsoil (TP600) Loose gravel layer (TP601). Contained modern pottery, glass, possibly human bone (reburied)

Table 1: Summary test pit and context descriptions

5.2 Trenches

Two trenches (Plates 7 and 8) were opened after the test pits to the southern and northern sides of the church tower. These were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.55m below the surface. Each of these trenches was split by an unexcavated baulk but as the deposits were the same on either side of the baulk, separate trench numbers were not assigned

Both trenches revealed made ground deposits, as expected from the layers observed in the test pits. Drainage pipes were visible in both areas, along with a further modern brick manhole cover in Trench 1. In both trenches some disarticulated human bone was present. This was retained on site for reburial.

Within both trenches, a widening of the tower base was revealed in the form of a 45 degree chamfer. This feature did not continue around the later nave of the church, and was obscured by the doorway in Trench 2. The tower is considered to date to the early 15th century, and similar chamfers are present on upper stages

Details of the trenches excavated, and the contexts recorded are presented in Tables 2 and 3 below. Both trenches were 5.3m by 6m in dimension.

Context number	Max Depth	Description and interpretation
100	0.23m	Dark grey brown sandy silt- topsoil
101	0.13m	Mixed mid grey brown sandy silt with some small sub-rounded stones and modern material- made ground deposit
102	>0.10m	Mid to light pinkish grey sandy silt with frequent small rounded stones and occasional concentrations of lime- made ground deposit

Table 2: Summary of contexts, Trench 1

Context number	Max Depth	Description and interpretation
200	0.25m	Dark grey brown sandy silt- topsoil

Context number	Max Depth	Description and interpretation
201	>0.20m	Mixed mid grey brown sandy silt with some small sub-rounded stones and modern material- made ground deposit

Table 3: Summary of contexts, Trench 2

6 Artefactual evidence

6.1 Pottery by Rob Hedge MCIfA

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

A small assemblage of 42 artefacts weighing 1.388kg were recovered from deposits 102 and 201 within the trenches. The majority comprised post-medieval domestic pottery. Small quantities of glass, animal bone, oyster shell, and building material were also recorded.

period	material	object type	count	weight (g)
medieval/post-medieval	ceramic	flat roof tile	2	214
post-medieval	ceramic	pot	37	1097
post-medieval	glass	pot	1	62
undated	animal bone	sheep/goat metapodial	1	9
undated	shell	oyster shell	1	6
Totals			42	1388

Table 2 Quantification of artefacts

Deposit 102 contained a wide variety of pottery dating from the 17th to the early 19th century; the presence of decorated coarse slipwares (fabric 91) and redwares (fabric 78), alongside salt-glazed stoneware (fabric 81.5), creamware (fabric 84), pearlware, and early engine-turned earthenwares is typical of the second half of the 18th century. A single plain sherd of refined earthenware that may be an early whiteware pushes the *terminus post quem* for the formation of this deposit past AD 1800, but it reflects largely 18th century activity.

Deposit 201 is slightly later and is dominated by redwares in the form of large bowls or pancheons. These forms extended from the 18th into the 19th century. The presence of several sherds of factory-made yellowware indicates that this deposit could not have formed before AD 1830.

Broad period	fabric code	Fabric common name	count	weight (g)
Post-medieval	77	Midlands yellow ware	2	38
Post-medieval	78	Post-medieval red ware	15	719
Post-medieval	81.5	White salt-glazed stoneware	1	10
Post-medieval	82	Tin-glazed ware	1	63
Post-medieval	84	Creamware	1	9
Post-medieval	N/A	Pearlware	1	32
Post-medieval	90	Post-medieval orange ware	1	15
Post-medieval	91	Post-medieval buff wares	8	90

Post-medieval	N/A	Engine-turned dipped earthenware	4	37
Post-medieval/Modern	N/A	Factory-made yellowware	2	80
Post-medieval/Modern	85	Modern china	1	4
Totals			37	1097

Table 3 Quantification of the pottery by period and fabric type

6.1.1 Discussion

The artefacts are typical domestic debris and are likely to represent waste from Evesham households from the 17th to the early 19th century, deposited on the site in the period during which the church was abandoned in the early 19th century, or during reconstruction works in the 1830s.

6.1.2 Recommendations

The artefacts are not thought to warrant accession with Museums Worcestershire. However, they are an attractive, tactile assemblage of local interest, and may be suitable for use by the local Almonry Museum as a teaching/handling collection.

6.2 Stone

A monument stone was recovered from deposit (201), within trench 2. This is illustrated on (Figure 3). The stone was a blue lias limestone 0.06m in depth and originally over 0.83m in width. Its surviving height was over 0.36m. Its front was painted black, up to the edge of a slightly chamfered recess, with faint remnants of gold lettering visible, though not consistently legible. The paint and gold lettering indicate that this was an internal monument, and its unpainted chamfer edge is likely to have been set within a wooden frame. The memorial is not closely dateable, but is of a style which predominated in the 16th to 17th centuries.

One further piece of limestone was present in (201) which retained some elements of a chamfer along one edge. The profile of this chamfer (Figure 4) was comparable with the interior detailing of the southern chapel of the church, which is considered to date to the early 16th century, though it is possible that these piece is a remnant of a later repair.

Neither of these pieces of stone was considered suitable for retention.

7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was approached using standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no deposits were excavated which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion and conclusions

The excavation of test pits and trenches adjacent to the church building revealed evidence of modern drainage to deal with the run off from the church roof. Layers of rubble and gravel mixed with pottery, glass and some fragments of disarticulated human bone interpreted as made ground. Analysis of the pottery suggested a likely 18th century or early 19th century, with individual sherds spanning the 17th to 19th century. It is probable that this reflects a period of known dereliction after a roof collapse in the 18th century before a programme of remodelling in the 1830s, a date relevant to the pottery from deposit (201).

No grave cuts or other features were identified during the watching brief. The disarticulated human bone is likely to be the result of the long use of the graveyard and multiple episodes of grave digging and, as such, is normal for this setting. A further architectural detail of the tower was exposed in the form of a chamfer at its base, mirroring those on its upper stages.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in all of the trenches/areas to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. It is considered that the nature, density and distribution of archaeological features provides an accurate characterisation of the development site as a whole.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Elizabeth Connolly ACIfA and Tim Cornah ACIfA.

The project was managed by Tom Rogers, MCIfA. This report was produced and collated by Elizabeth Connolly and Tim Cornah.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of this project: Stephen Oliver of Oliver Architecture Ltd.

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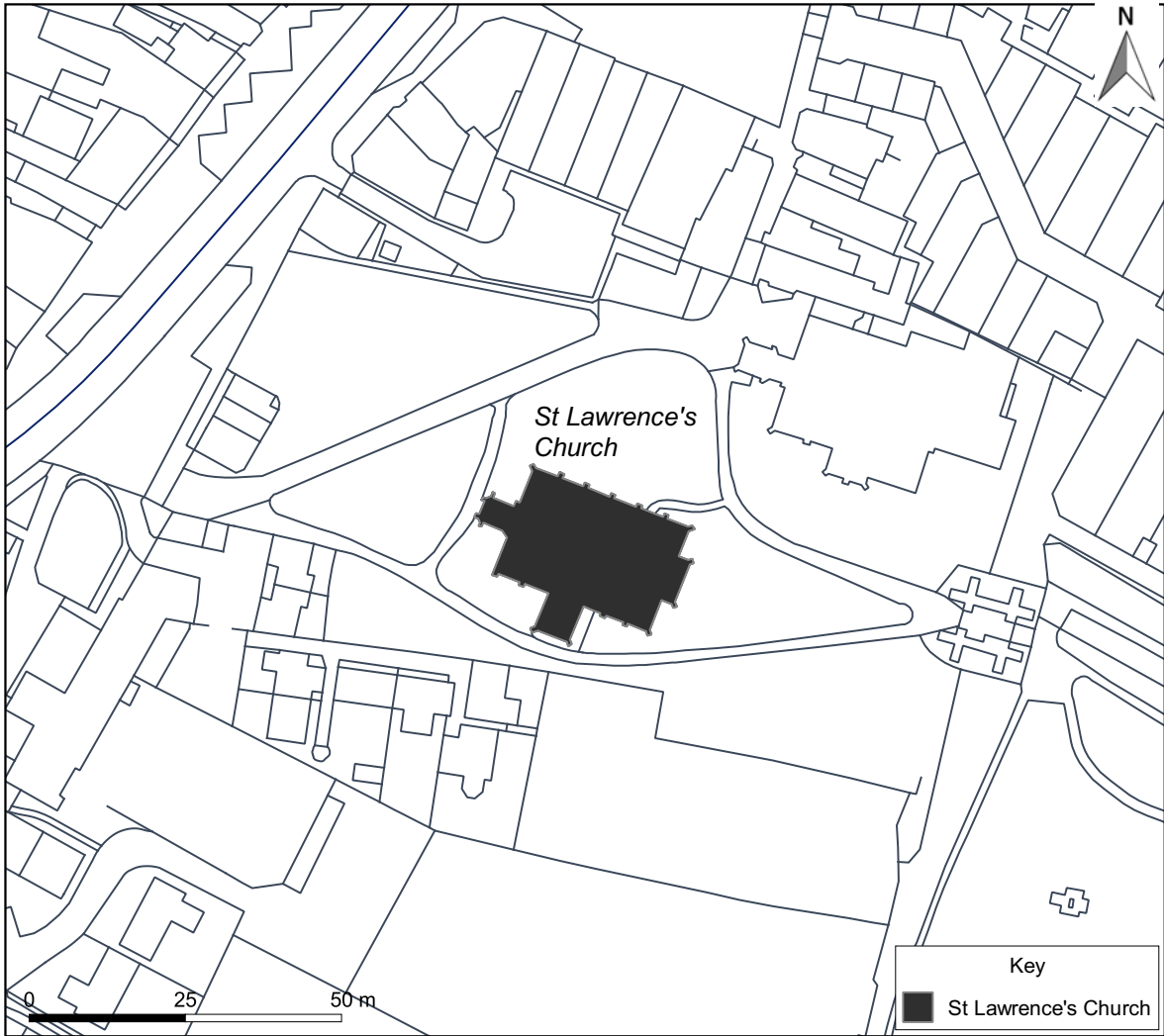
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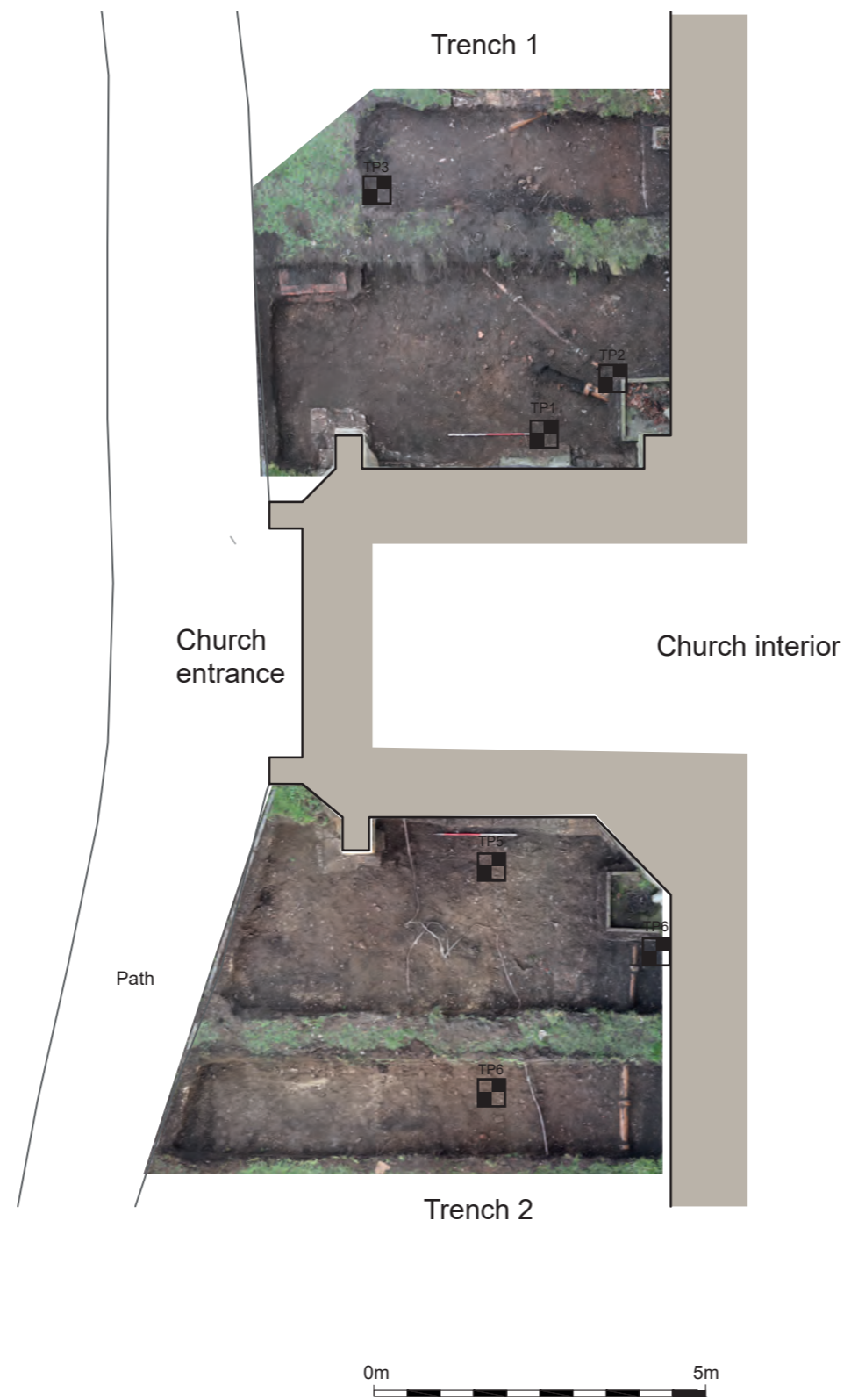
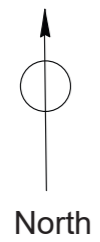
Figures



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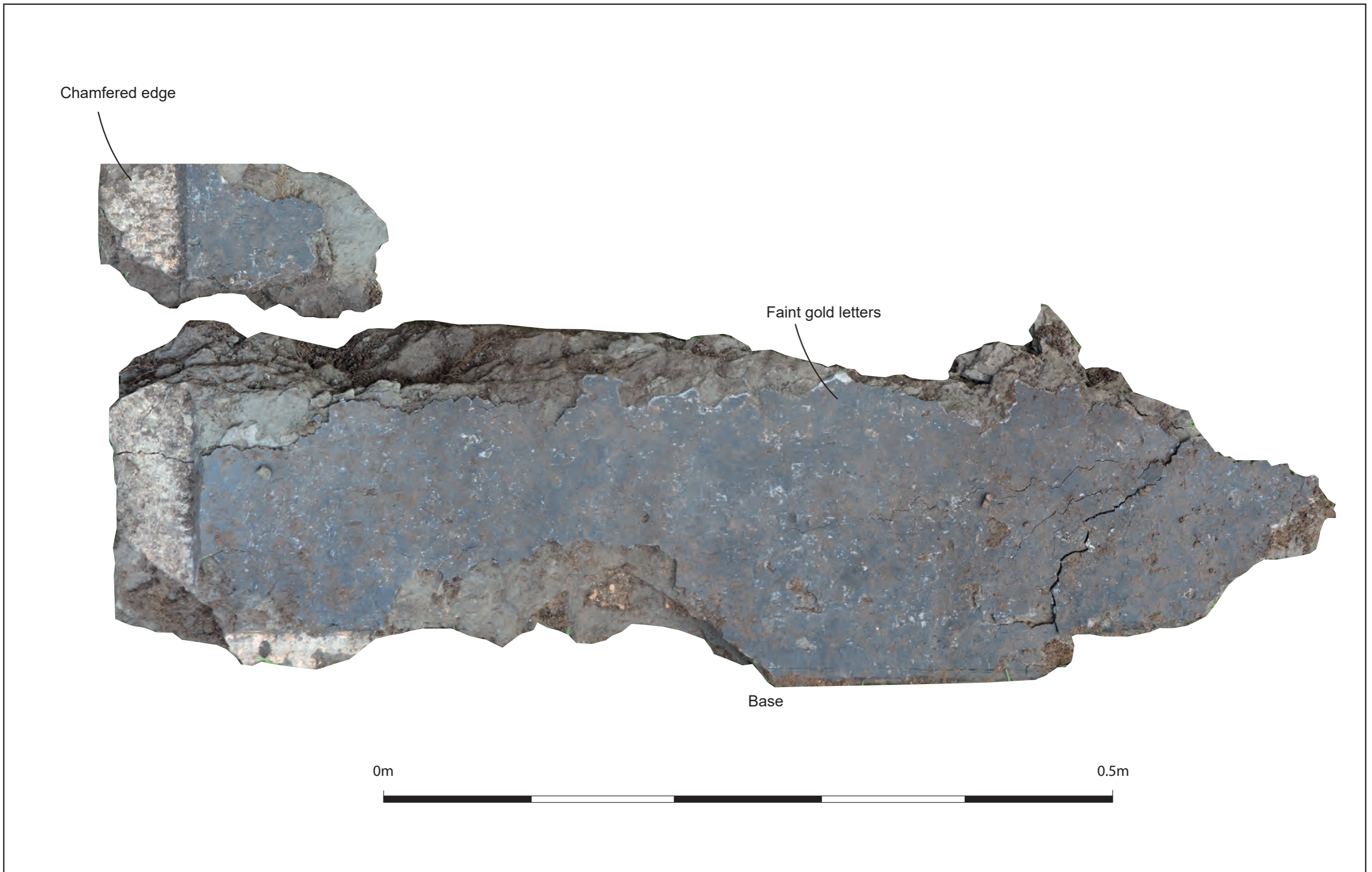
Location of the site

Figure 1



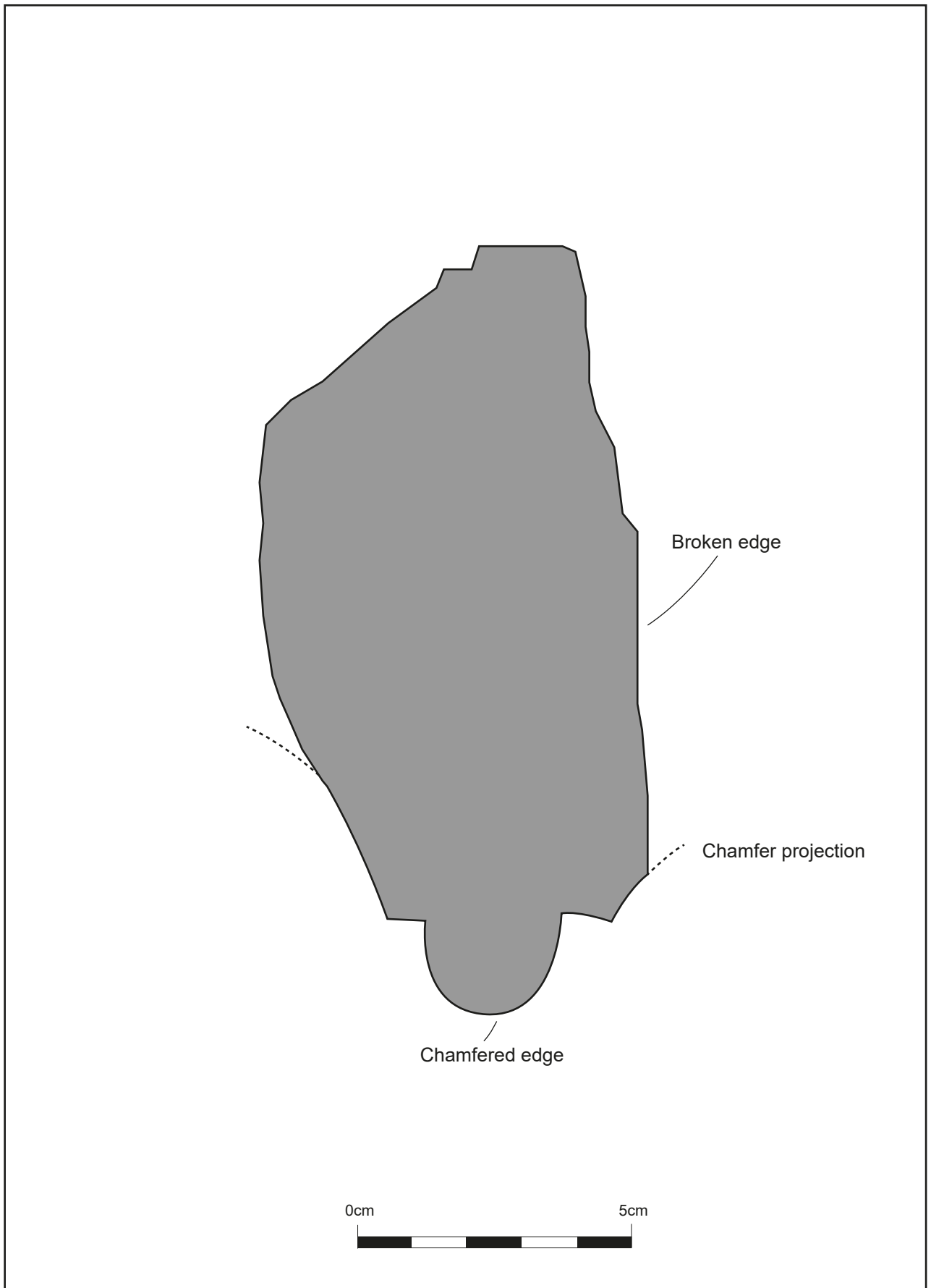
Trenches 1 and 2 photogrammetric plans with test pit locations
(after Rubix Consulting drawing number C120067/DRG/001)

Figure 2



Photogrammetric plan of memorial slab from deposit 201

Figure 3



Chamfered stone cross section from deposit 201

Figure 4

Plates



Plate 1: Test Pit 1 from north-west



Plate 2: Test Pit 2 from north-west



Plate 3: Test Pit 3 from north



Plate 4: Test Pit 4 from west



Plate 5: Test Pit 5 from south



Plate 6: Test Pit 6 from west



Plate 7 Trench 1, looking south-east, scale 1m



Plate 8, trench 2, looking north, scale 1m

