

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**St. NEOT PARISH CHURCH,
St. NEOT, LISKEARD, CORNWALL**

(SX 18607 67856)

On behalf of

Charles Hunt Architect

December 2007

REPORT FOR Charles Hunt
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted a watching brief during the ground reduction work at St. Neot Parish Church. Two burials were recorded inside the churchyard; the first was complete and left in-situ, the second had been heavily disturbed and was in a very poor state of preservation, it was removed for reburial within the churchyard.

The area to the east of the church had been disturbed sometime in the 19th century. A large pit had been excavated through made-ground against the churchyard wall and this was filled with material containing building or demolition material. A slate built drain was recorded running roughly north east to south west, this appeared to have silted-up in the late 19th – early 20th century. Also recorded was a buried land surface containing 16th – 17th century pottery.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The village of St Neot is situated in the hundred of West and is today within the area administered by Caradon District Council. It is located at a bend in the valley of the River Loveny, also called St Neot River, a tributary of the River Fowey. The church of St Anietus lies on the east side of the village of St Neot, near Liskeard (NGR SX 18607 67856). It is situated at a height of *c.* 108m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

Caradon District Council granted planning permission for alterations to the vestry and construction of disabled access into the churchyard and into the church via the tower entrance (06/01147/FUL). As the work was to be located in an area of archaeological significance a condition was attached to the permission requiring a programme of archaeological works to be carried out during the course of the ground-works.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Background information on the site and a 500m radius of the site has been obtained from the Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record, the Cornwall Records Office and the Cornwall Centre.

There was a possible monastery site within the village during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1003-1066) and was founded in honour of St Neot who died in 890. The Exeter Domesday reports that William, Earl of Moreton took away all the lands except 1 acre which he left to the priests (Borlase 1769). St Neot is recorded in Domesday (as Neotestow) as a religious house with the clergy holding the manor before 1066. Soon after the conquest it was disbanded and became a parish church.

Apart from the church and the other listed/scheduled structures within the churchyard there is no recorded archaeology within the churchyard or immediate vicinity. This is probably due to the lack of archaeological survey or intervention within the area.

The church, (Grade 1 listed) is dedicated to St Anietus and is mainly 15th century with 16th century additions. Henderson suggests that the church is dedicated to a 5th. or 6th. century Celtic saint rather than a 9th century Saxon. He also records that the church was rededicated in 1321 and rebuilt the following century (Henderson 1928).

“The church is designed to show its most spectacular side to those arriving in the valley. The plan is Cornish standard, but in the exterior unusual stress is placed on the south aisle and south porch, both built of large, regular granite blocks” (Pevsner 1970)

The church consists of a chancel, nave, north aisle, south aisle, south porch and a three stage buttressed tower. The south aisle and porch are 15th century and Pevsner suggests that the (west) tower is the oldest part. The church is famous for its 16th century stained glass window and contains a 15th century font bowl mounted on a 13th century shaft. In 1313 the vicar contracted leprosy and the Bishop ordered that apartments in the vicarage were set aside for his use (Henderson 1928). The vicarage stands to the north of the church

Walls (Grade 2 listed) enclose the churchyard to west and south, west gateway and south east gateway. They are possibly 16th century with rebuilding of 19th century gateways. The walls comprise slatestone rubble without coping; gateways in granite with granite steps and cast iron gates. The walls are about 4 metres high, and vary with the slope of the ground. The west gateway has a flight of 6 granite steps, walls to sides with plain granite coping. The south east gateway has 4 granite steps with rails to sides, granite jambs to the gateway, with pair of similar cast iron gates, also with wrought iron overthrow with lamp (details from EH Listing particulars).

There is anecdotal evidence and a reference (Thomas 2004) to the churchyard having been larger at some unspecified time in the past. The reference in Thomas is not specific and does not cite any documentary or cartographic evidence to support the claim.

The Tithe Map (Sandercock 1842) shows the churchyard wall in much the same place as it appears on the Ordnance Survey 1st, 2nd and County Series editions but does indicate that southern part of the area was used as an orchard. The Fawton, Linkindale and Lewarne, St Neot map (Howton 1868) provides no additional information about the churchyard that is not shown on the Tithe map. It seems unlikely that the churchyard could have extended to the south as it is bounded by the high enclosure wall with the main east–west road immediately adjacent. Thomas does state that the road has been widened in the past and that houses immediately to the south of the road were demolished with only Dye Cottage (Grade 2 listed) remaining (Thomas, 2004). Another possibility is that the churchyard extended to the west into land that is currently occupied by The London Inn and car park, also the site of other buildings now demolished. The London Inn and other buildings are shown on Tithe and 1st and 2nd edition OS maps and appear on a 1920s photograph of the church. However this is purely conjecture and no evidence for an enlarged churchyard has been found.

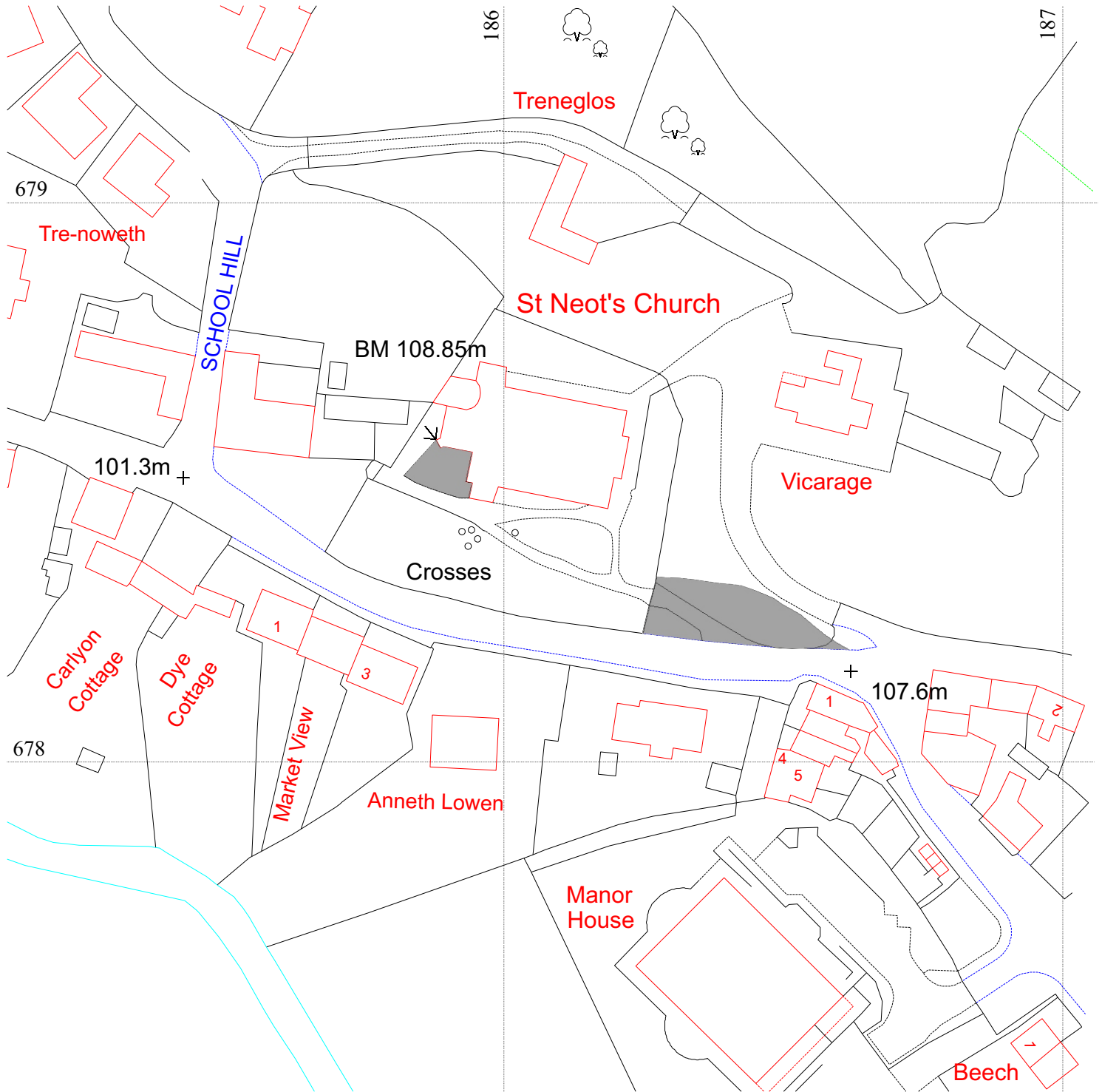


Figure 1. Location Map

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as were as follows:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, date and significance of any archaeological remains encountered
- To establish the nature of the activity on site
- To identify any artefacts relating to the occupation of the site
- To make public the results of the investigations.

In particular:

- To provide further information on the archaeology of the site of St Neot Parish Church and its churchyard,

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Cornwall County Council Historic Environment Service (HES). Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored the soil strip and ground reduction in the area of the churchyard and the area to the east outside the churchyard.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and those proposed by MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

4 RESULTS (Figures 2 & 3)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Excavation Results

The Churchyard

The excavation within the churchyard (Fig. 2) went to a maximum depth of 1m below present ground level. This maximum depth was reached at the section nearest the main east-west access path to the church. Here a relatively modern dry stone slate wall was partially removed to allow a 1.6m wide access way.

The lowest deposit recorded was a heavily disturbed mottled light grey to yellow brown silty clay (21) with approximately 20% small stones and slate pieces. This was over 0.8m thick. Earth cables for lightning conductors had been buried in this area. The first inspection stamp on the conductor on the church tower was 1974. Also a drain was noted running south parallel to the porch.

Within this deposit two articulated inhumations were recorded. No grave cuts could be recognised, both had been disturbed at later dates. The first inhumation (22) was partially uncovered. It was an adult laid supine. The pelvis had been cut through and the lower portion of the skeleton was missing, as was the right arm. The area from the sternum upwards was not exposed. The skeleton was recorded, left *in-situ*, and recovered with at least 0.2m of soil. It was considered that the ground reduction work was too deep in this area.

The second inhumation (23) was in a very poor state of preservation, having been cut through probably on a number of occasions. All that remained was a section of an adult's upper left femur, a small section of adjoining pelvis and some bones of the left hand that had probably been placed on the hip. This skeleton was lifted but it was agreed with the Cornwall County Council Historic Environment Service that it was too fragmentary to warrant further analysis and was passed to the local Vicar for reburial within the Churchyard.

Both burials were not strictly aligned east to west, but more south east to north west. This is out of line with the church and the gravestones in the area. However there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the stones in this area were moved or re-positioned in the last century. This is likely to be true as the writing on the stone faces to the west, apparently to be easily read from the path, when one would expect it to face east over the grave as is usual in other parishes in the region.

Covering (21) was a topsoil of dark brown silty loam (20) this was up to 0.18m thick in places.

The Area to the East of the Churchyard (Figure 3)

This area consisted of part of the vicarage garden with a retaining wall (13). This wall was roughly 2m tall, with the garden level with the top. The area in front of the wall was a tarmac path leading to the church and an area of grass that sloped gently towards the road. The wall was to be removed and an area behind it cut out, sloped in places. Two new walls were then to be built either side of the existing entranceway into the churchyard. The grassed area was to be reduced to the level of the road.

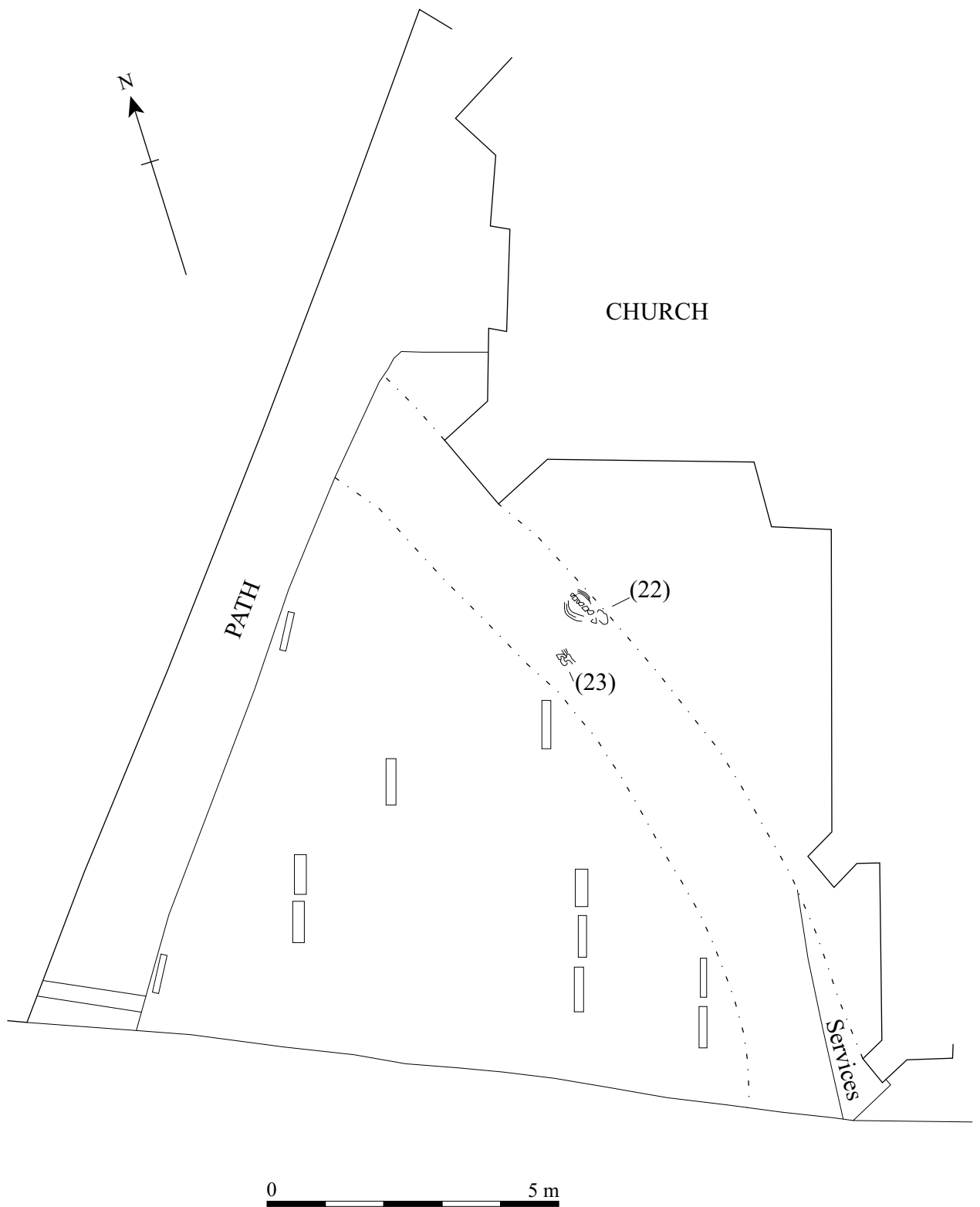


Figure 2. The Churchyard Area

In the south of the site, towards the modern road, the lowest natural deposit was a blue-grey clay (19) with some bands of iron staining. This was overlain by a very compact blue-grey clay with about 80% slate (12), that was 0.2m thick in this area. Over this was a 0.2m thick layer of compact yellow-brown silty clay (18) with 40% stone and slate. Covering this was a dark grey humic loam topsoil (01) that was up to 0.1m thick.

This area would appear to have been reduced in height at an earlier date to allow access to the churchyard through the east gate. This reduction would have created a section against the hillside this was retained by a dry stone slate wall.

The modern retaining wall (13) was 2m high and 0.3m wide. It abutted the churchyard wall. When this was removed the remnant of an earlier dry stone slate wall (14) was observed. This had been partially demolished and poorly preserved, but also appears to have been 0.3m wide.

Behind the wall a sequence of deposits were recorded. The lowest natural deposit encountered was a very compact blue-grey clay with about 80% slate (12), that was at least 0.7m thick in this area.

Above the natural (12) was a layer of orange-brown silty-clay (11) flecked with charcoal, with 5-10% small slate fragments. The thickness varied from 0.3m in the east to up to 1.2m in the west closer to the church. This appeared to follow the slope of the land from west to east. Over this was a 0.2m thick layer of compact dark brown clayey silt (05). This layer was flecked with charcoal and some pottery was recovered from it.

In the centre and east of the area deposit (05) was overlain by a 0.05m thick layer of grey silt that contained approximately 70% gravel (07). Over this was a compact brown clayey silt (06) that was roughly 0.05m thick on average. This layer showed some signs of iron staining, possibly from iron panning Fig. 4, section 2).

Built on top of the gravel layer (07) was a drain culvert (08). This was constructed of slate, mostly it appeared of dry stone technique, but there were traces of lime mortar in places. The floor of the drain was thin slates laid flat often in pairs, while the roof was of considerably thicker single slabs. The internal dimensions varied slightly along its length, but were on average 0.35m wide and 0.3m high (Fig. 4, section 4). It ran roughly north east to south west, about 1m from the wall (14) it took a vertical drop of 1.9m. This section was also slate built and 0.4m square.

The drain had silted-up during use and contained a deposit of dark grey silt and gravels (09). A single pottery sherd was recovered from this, dated to 1820-60. It is identified as a drain because industrial leats in the area are usually simple clay lined features (Ausin *et.al.* 1989)

The vertical section of this drain appeared to have been cut [10] into deposit (05). The drain itself was constructed upon the gravel layer (07). It is likely that this layer was part of the construction process, possibly it was meant to allow water to percolate easily through the soils. The staining in the layer (06) above was probably due to the leaching effects of water. These layers were only on the eastern side, down slope, of the drain.

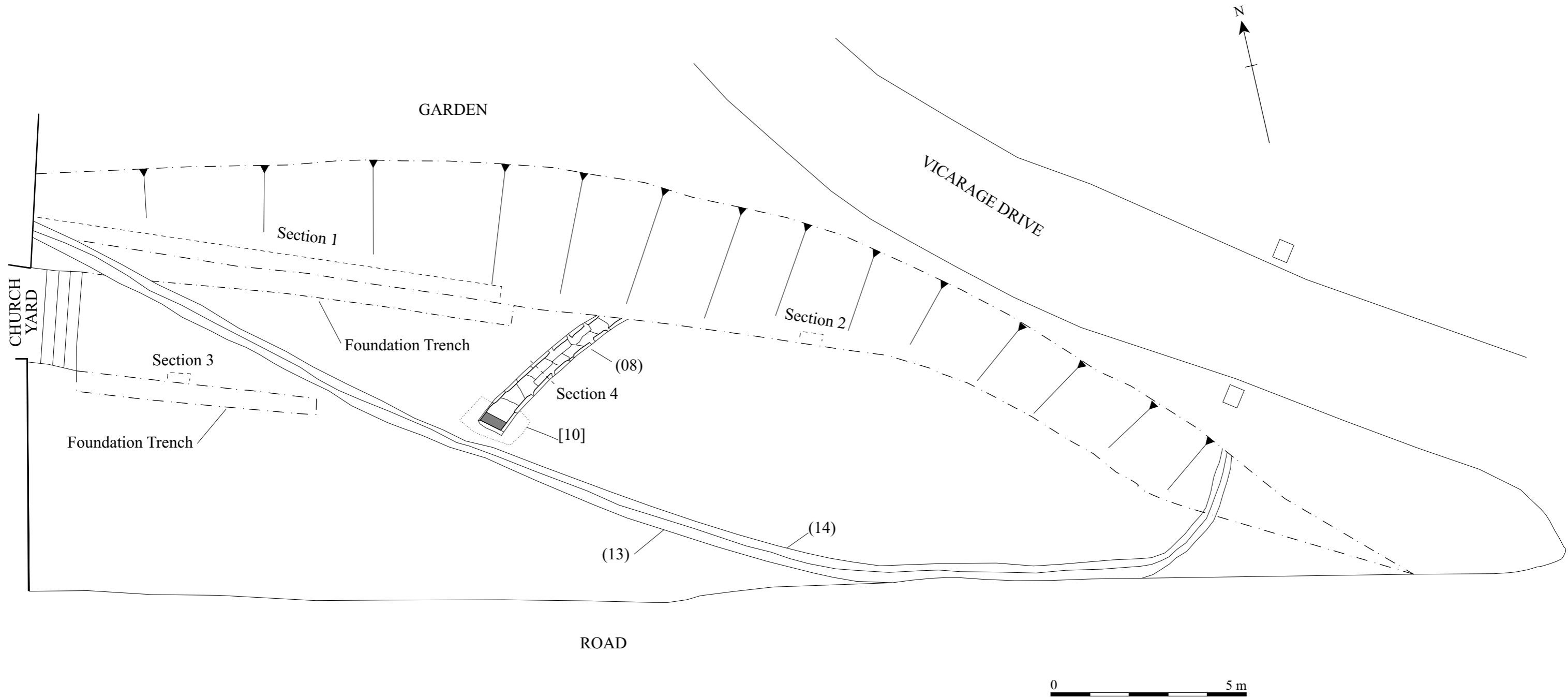
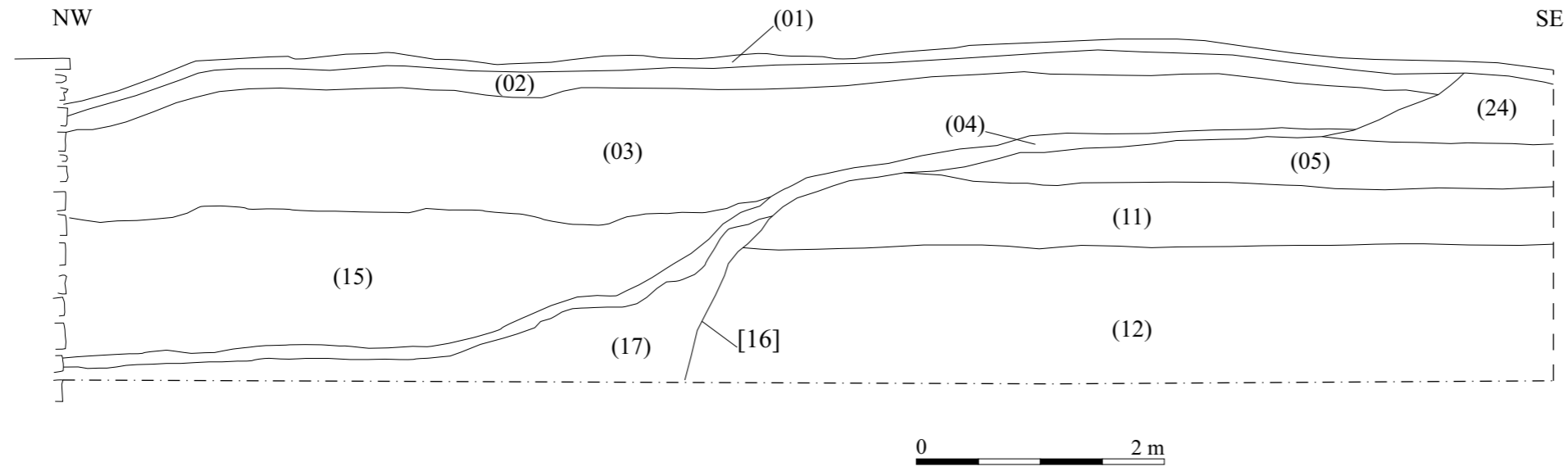
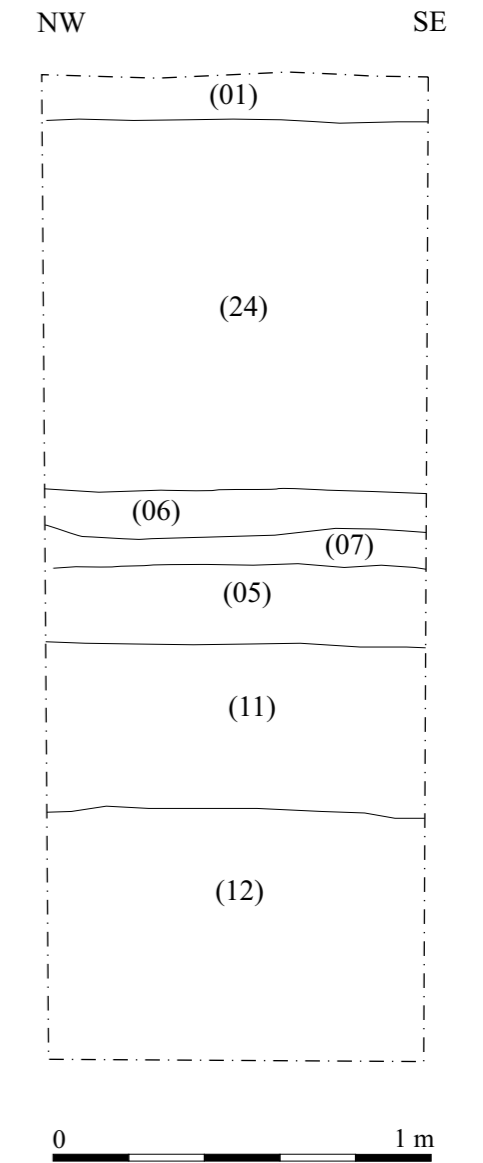


Figure 3. Plan of Eastern Area

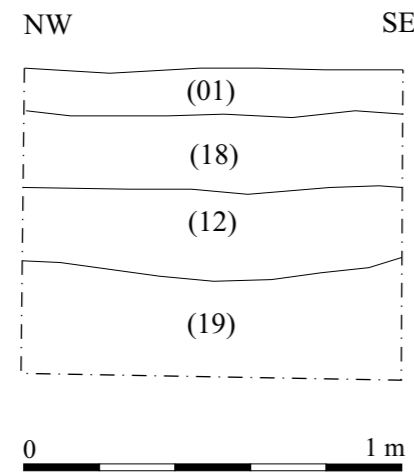
Section 1



Section 2



Section 3



Section 4

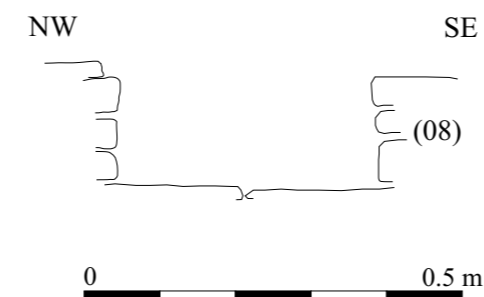


Figure 4. Sections

The drain (08) was not observed continuing to the south after the vertical drop. Covering the drain (08) and deposit (06) was a layer of dark brown clayey silt (24), flecked with charcoal that contained the odd stone and slate fragment. It was roughly 1m thick, but decreased in thickness towards the west.

Cut into this layer (24) was a very large pit [16]. It extended 11m from the eastern churchyard wall. The eastern side sloped towards this wall at roughly 30° until roughly 5m from the wall it became near vertical. The cut was over 2m deep and the base was not seen, as it continued below the level of the construction works.

The lowest recorded fill of this pit was a loose light brown-grey silty-clay (17) with large quantities of slate rubble. This measured at least 1m at its thickest point. Above this was a compact layer (04) of sand and mortar that was between 0.05m and 0.1m thick. Over this was a compact brown-grey silty clay (15) that was up to 1.2m thick. On top of this was a friable pale grey loamy silt (03) with brick and slate rubble, which was up to 0.8m thick. These deposits sloped from east to west to rest against the churchyard wall suggesting a series of tips.

The uppermost fill of the pit [16] was a friable brown grey silty loam (02) with slate fragments including roofing tiles. It was on average roughly 0.3m thick.

Covering both deposits (02) and (24) was a dark grey humic-loam topsoil (01) that was up to 0.1m thick.

Removed spoil was dumped on a local farm at grid reference SX 1938 6842.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques

The garden area had a number of tree stumps from mature trees within it. The root bowls of these trees were over 1m deep in places and had to be removed using a toothed bucket. This disturbance coupled with the use of a toothed bucket made initial observations difficult.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (By John Allan, Exeter Archaeology)

A total of 24 sherds were excavated. As is often the case, much of the material is of late date – in this instance the first half of the 19th century – but there is sufficient pottery of earlier date here to indicate that there was probably continuous occupation close to the site from the 14th and 15th centuries to the recent past. The medieval sherds consist of Lostwithiel-type ware – pottery characterised by the presence of flakes of predominantly white mica, intermixed with quartz sand and other inclusions, contrasting with the black mica seen more plentifully in other micaceous wares in south-west England. It is probable that most or all of these wares were made in the potteries operating in Lostwithiel, although there may have been outlying kilns making this kind of ceramics (Douch 1969; Miles 1976; 1979; O'Mahoney 1989; Vince and Brown 1989; Taylor and Allan 1998–9). The early post-medieval wares illustrate the marked rise in the quantity of pottery supplied from North Devon – a

point also apparent in the larger sample from West Colliford Mill (Litt and Austin 1989).

The dates of the individual pottery types are shown below in Roman type; overall dating of the contexts, indicated by the latest sherds present, are shown in **bold**.

<i>Con-text</i>	<i>Pottery types</i>	<i>No. of sherds</i>	<i>Min. No. of vessels</i>	<i>Comments/dates</i>
03	Staffordshire creamware & transfer-printed white ware	3	3	Mid 19C
	19C tile	1	1	
05	Lostwithiel-type medieval hand-made, unglazed	2	1	1 cooking pot, 13-14C
	“ thrown	2	2	1 wheel-thrown ?jar 15C-16C
	N Devon gravel-tempered	3	2	chamber pot; bowl late 16-17C
09	transfer-printed white ware	1	1	Willow pattern, 1820–60
17	transfer-printed white ware	1	1	Landscape, 1800–30
20	marmalade jar	1	1	late 19C-early 20C
	other modern sherds	4	4	
21	Lostwithiel-type ridge tile, late med/early post-med	1	1	unglazed, perhaps 14-15C
	N Devon calcareous	2	1	glazed base, 16C-early 17C
24	Lostwithiel-type medieval hand-made, unglazed	1	1	13-14C
	N Devon calcareous	1	1	16C-early 17C
	N Devon gravel-tempered	1	1	16C-18C

5.2 Human Bone

All human bone was passed to the local Vicar for reburial. No material was retained for analysis.

5.3 Other Finds

Parts of corroded coffin furniture were recovered from the churchyard in contexts (20) and (21).

A rectangular slate slab was recovered from context (05). This slab measured 0.47m by 0.28m by 0.02m. It was broken in one corner with approximately a quarter missing. It had been drilled with 14 holes in 5 rows. It is likely to be drain cover.

5.4 Environmental Samples

No environmental evidence was recovered.

6 DISCUSSION

The majority of the work within the churchyard was not of a sufficient depth to impact upon any inhumations, however, two were recorded. One of the inhumations that were recorded was only found because the machine went beyond the depth required for the foundations required by the path. This skeleton was recorded and then recovered. The second was slightly higher but had been heavily disturbed by later activity, probably from further burials in the area and by the placement of lightning conductors in the 1970's.

There was no evidence that the churchyard extended to the east in this area. Any evidence that the churchyard only extended a short way further east would have been removed by the digging of the 19th century pit [16].

The Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record (HER) marks the location of a post-medieval Bell Foundry (17201) in the area of the excavation outside the churchyard. Thomas (2004) mentions that there are several occurrences for the recasting of the church bells, including one for 1611 when the bell-founders did the work in a local field. It would appear that only anecdotal evidence places the position of this work in the location recorded by the HER. Evidence suggests that the ground level (05) was significantly lower in this area in the 16th – 17th century, on par with the level of the modern churchyard. If such foundry work did take place here next to the churchyard it is likely that all evidence has been subsequently destroyed. .

7 THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of the following:

The project brief	The primary site records
Written scheme of investigation	The photographic and drawn records
The project report	

The Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services. The archive will be transferred to The Royal Cornwall Museum

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