

Church of St. John the Baptist, Kingston Bagpuize, Oxfordshire

NGR SU 407 981

Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1996

Church of St John the Baptist, Kingston Bagpuize

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

SU 4072 9812

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at the Church of St John the Baptist, Kingston Bagpuize on behalf of the church authorities. The evaluation revealed deposits representing soil build-up within the churchyard. These deposits contained a quantity of medieval pottery and some later material. The pottery was little abraded and sherds of a good size. It is likely that this pottery indicates medieval activity or settlement in the vicinity, but no archaeologically significant remains were located in the evaluation.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

In June 1996 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation in the churchyard of St John the Baptist Church, Kingston Bagpuize (SU 4072 9812) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council in respect of a proposal to construct a small hall adjacent to the church. The development site lay immediately to the north of the nave of the church and is approximately 63 square metres in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies on the Corallian Ridge at between 81.5 and 82 m OD. The natural geology is sand. The site is situated on a very slightly raised site within the churchyard and drops away immediately to the north of the proposed development.

1.3 Archaeological background

According to the VCH, *Berkshire* (Vol IV, 352), the present church of St John the Baptist was built in 1800, and little is known of its predecessor beyond the fact that its tower was rebuilt in 1603. There is charter evidence for settlements at Longworth, Draycott Moor and Kingston Bagpuize in the later Saxon period and it can be suggested that the basic structure of modern parish boundaries had its origin in secular township boundaries which originated probably in that same period. In the medieval period Kingston Bagpuize and Draycott Moor (now Southmoor) formed parts of Longworth parish. Kingston Bagpuize became a separate parish in the 16th century. The parish of Draycott Moor separated from Longworth only in 1866; it merged with Kingston Bagpuize in 1971 (OAU 1992, 6-7).

2 EVALUATION AIMS

The aims of the evaluation were:

- to establish the presence/absence of significant archaeological features and/or deposits.
- to determine the extent and condition, nature, character, quality and date of any such features and/or deposits
- to determine the environmental potential of any features and/or deposits
- to communicate the results of the evaluation to the client

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation consisted of 2 hand dug trenches one measuring 2 m long and 1 m wide, and one 3 m long and 1 m wide (Fig 2). Together these formed a 7-8% sample of the development area. Both trenches were to be excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2 m below the present ground surface. The programme of works was based on a scheme agreed prior to the commencement of fieldwork, but was not formally outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The trenches were excavated and cleaned by hand. The only revealed feature was excavated to the prescribed depth of 1.2 m below present ground level to determine its character and to retrieve datable finds. This feature was planned and a section drawn at a scale of 1:20. Trench sections were drawn at 1:20 and plans at 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate. All trenches and the single feature were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

Finds were collected on site by hand sorting and all material except human bone was retained. No *in situ* burials were removed from graves and disarticulated material was collected for reburial. No sieving for finds nor scanning of spoil heaps was undertaken. Finds were cleaned, marked and boxed following fieldwork. All finds were quantified by context and material. Animal bone was identified to species. Pottery was identified and dated to general type and date by Lucy Whittingham.

3.4 Environmental data

Given the small scale of the evaluation no specific sampling strategy was proposed, but deposits were assessed for their environmental potential as and when the need arose.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The general soil type was a loose friable sandy loam. The presence of limestone makes for a neutral soil and the preservation of bone appeared to be good. Ground conditions were very dry with no preservation of waterlogged materials.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

Neither trench contained any significant archaeological features or deposits. Trench 1 was totally devoid of features, and Trench 2 contained only a recent grave cut. In both trenches a considerable depth of sand and loam deposits was uncovered with some recent dumping evident in Trench 2. Only in Trench 2 was the natural sand located.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 3 m x 1 m and was located at the southeast corner of the proposed church hall. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2 m below the present ground surface; the underlying natural sand was not uncovered at this depth. A yew tree located less than 3 m from Trench 1 is protected by a tree preservation order (TPO). Because of the TPO it was not permissible to cut the roots of the tree and this made excavation more difficult. The top of the trench was at 81.85 m OD and the excavation ceased at a depth of between 80.67 and 80.56 m OD.

The earliest deposit excavated was layer 1/003, which consisted of sand with some humus, and was 0.75 m deep. This deposit was progressively sandier towards the bottom and it is probable that it lay directly on the natural sand. The finds from 1/003 comprised pottery, ceramic building materials and animal bone. The pottery was predominantly medieval, although some 18th- or 19th-century material was recovered. Overlying 1/003, in the southern portion of the trench was a layer (1/002) composed of sand and stone. This was up to 0.26 m deep and had clearly been dumped, but did not form part of either a structure or a surface. At the north end of the trench it was clear that this layer had been disturbed or completely removed. The overlying dark sandy soil (1/001) was significantly deeper at the north end of the trench, and although no cut could be defined it seems likely that layer 1/002 had been dug away. It is possible, but unlikely, that the disturbance was caused by tree roots, which were more concentrated at this point.

Layer 1/002 was sealed by a layer of dark brown sandy soil (1/001) generally 0.30 m deep, but up to 0.45 m deep at the north end. Layer 1/001 was excavated as one layer, but in section showed two clearly identifiable horizons. Both horizons comprised dark brown sandy loam, and are recent in date. The two horizons were separated by sporadic lenses of gravel and stones and traces of burnt material, probably representing bonfires. The upper horizon forms the present topsoil and is *c.* 0.15 m deep. A layer of sand and stone (1/004) was seen in the north face of the trench. This was found sealed between the two horizons in layer 1/001. Layer 1/004 is, therefore, likely to represent re-deposited material perhaps derived from 1/002 rather than a continuation of 1/002. The latter was sealed beneath both horizons of 1/001.

5.1.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 2 m x 1 m and was located at the northwest corner of the proposed church hall. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2 m below the present ground surface. At that depth the underlying natural sand (2/008) was revealed. The top of the trench was 81.40 m OD at the south end and 81.42 m OD at the north end and the excavation ceased at 80.03 m OD. The lie of the land was such that Trench 2 was approximately 0.45 m lower than Trench 1, although lying only 6.5 m from it to the northwest.

Sealing the natural sand was a layer of disturbed orange brown sand (2/007), which was 0.20 m deep and devoid of finds. It was sealed by a layer (2/006) of mid brown sand with humus; it was stone-free. This layer was 0.45 m thick and contained animal bone and pottery. The pottery was all of medieval date. The animal bone was all from domestic species. The context also produced an iron key probably of late 18th- to early 20th-century date. 2/006 was distinguished from 2/007 by a greater humic content. Overlying 2/006 was a sandy loam layer 2/002, which was 0.55 m thick and shaded from dark to mid brown in colour. This contained a good deal of stone. The finds from 2/002 comprised medieval and post-medieval pottery, a quantity of animal bone and two fragments of clay pipe stem. The post-medieval pottery is of 17th-18th-century date.

Layer 2/002 was cut by a deep narrow slot (2/003) orientated on an east-west alignment. Two fills were identified; the upper fill (2/004) was a mixture of dark brown sandy loam with yellow sand, while the lower fill (2/005) comprised almost clean natural sand, but with some patches of dark brown sandy loam. Both fills contained small quantities of pottery and single sherds of vessel glass. The cut has been identified as a grave on the basis of its form, depth and alignment. No burial was encountered, but the cut was deeper than the excavated trench and not bottomed at 1.2 m. The upper fill (2/004) of the grave (2/003) and layer 2/002 were both sealed by the dark brown sandy topsoil (2/001).

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 Pottery by Lucy Whittingham

The pottery from the evaluation was all recovered from topsoil or subsoil deposits, with the exception of a small quantity from the fills (2/004 & 2/005) of the presumed grave cut 2/003. There is every reason to believe that this material is re-deposited.

The bulk of the pottery is of medieval date. (Detailed characterisation of the pottery is given in Appendix 3.) The pottery does not come from archaeological features and nor is it associated with structural evidence, but is noteworthy on two counts: firstly the sherd size is good, and secondly there is little evidence of abrasion. For both these reasons, it is suggested that the deposits from which the medieval pottery recovered were not heavily re-worked by human activity. Although the quantity of medieval pottery recovered is small in overall terms (a total of 58 sherds), given the scale of the trenching the assemblage is quite respectable.

A small amount of post-medieval pottery was also recovered. This came exclusively from the upper deposits.

5.2.2 *Other finds*

Two items of metalwork were found. A tumbler lock key was recovered from layer 2/006 in Trench 2, and a tubular object, which may have been an optical instrument, was found in layer 1/001. Both objects are of recent, ie late 18th-century or later, date.

The other finds comprised for the most part building materials and human bones. The building materials comprise mainly brick, but also included 2 pieces of mortar or plaster, a small piece of roughly worked stone and fragments of slate. This material was mostly of late post-medieval date, but little was closely datable except for some sherds of Minety type tile from context 1/003. The latter can be assigned a medieval or possibly post-medieval date. Only 4 fragments of tobacco pipe stem were found (contexts 1/003 & 2/002).

The human skeletal material which was found was disarticulated and all derived from soil deposits. No burials were seen. The bones were separated from the other finds and reburied when the trenches were back-filled.

5.3 Environmental data

No environmental samples were taken because no significant archaeological features or deposits were uncovered. However small quantities of animal bone were recovered during by hand sorting during excavation.

5.3.1 *Animal bone*

The animal bone was disarticulated and the identified material was all from domestic species, namely, sheep, pig, cattle and horse. Some bone showed evidence for cutting, and one fragment (from context 1/003) had marked evidence for dog gnawing. Most of the bone was probably food waste. None of the material is from an archaeological significant context.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The only evidence for recent disturbance was the probable grave cut 2/003. Other than this, the stratigraphic sequence recovered was straightforward and little disturbed. Trench 1 was close to a yew tree which was protected by a Tree Preservation Order. Potentially, this could have effected the field investigation, firstly by direct disturbance of the integrity of archaeological deposits by the roots, and secondly by restrictions on the recording of layers and features because of the need to avoid cutting the tree's roots. In the event the problem of the roots was less that might have been feared. The impact undoubtedly would have been greater had significant archaeological deposits been located.

The medieval pottery recovered during excavation was notable for its lack of abrasion and the good size of the sherds; there is little evidence for re-deposition and for the significant re-working or disturbance of deposits.

6.2 Overall interpretation

The evaluation provides a small amount of evidence for medieval activity on or adjacent to the site. The evidence comprises unabraded medieval pottery. There is no direct evidence in the form of cut features, built structures or other archaeological remains.

The pottery was mainly recovered from layers 1/003, 2/002 and 2/006. The small number of sherds from the fills (2/004 & /005) of grave 2/003 are certainly re-deposited. By far the biggest group of the pottery (36 sherds of medieval pottery out of a total of 39 sherds plus 5 sherds of medieval tile) was recovered from layer 1/003. This layer and layer 2/006 are best interpreted as soil deposits which built up within the graveyard. Layer 1/003 was predominantly made up of sand with some humic material, and became less humic with depth. It was noticeable too that the few finds of post-medieval and later date were from the upper portion of this deposit. Layer 2/006 was similar in composition to 1/003. Layer 2/002, which overlaid 2/006, on the other hand was distinctive and contained quantities of stone. Layer 2/002 may represent deliberate dumping to level the churchyard. The finds included post-medieval material and a quantity of animal bone. No exactly comparable layer was found in Trench 1, but the deeper soil deposit (1/001) noted at the north end of Trench 1 may be the south edge of the same dumped deposit.

6.3 Impact of development

The lack of archaeologically cut features or sealed deposits limits the significance of the material found. On the basis of the limited archaeological significance of the evidence recovered from the evaluation site and the small scale of the development, the impact of the construction of the church hall on the archaeological resource is likely to be very limited.

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Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment
001					
	001	layer		0.3	2 horizons of dark brown sandy loam - modern garden soil;
	002	layer		0.26	compacted sand and stone; below 001, above 003
	003	layer		0.75	sand with loam; heavily disturbed by tree roots; below 002
	004	layer		0.1	sand and stone; sealed between the 2 horizons in 001
002					
	001	layer		0.16	modern garden soil; above 002
	002	layer		0.55	below 001, cut by 003, above 006
	003	cut	0.66	1.18	grave cut , not fully excavated; cut 002, filled by 004 & 005
	004	fill		0.7	upper fill of 003, above 005
	005	fill		0.48	lower fill of 003, below 004
	006	layer		0.44	below 002, above 007
	007	layer		0.22	below 006, above 008
	008	layer		-	natural; below 007

Appendix 2 - Context finds list by material

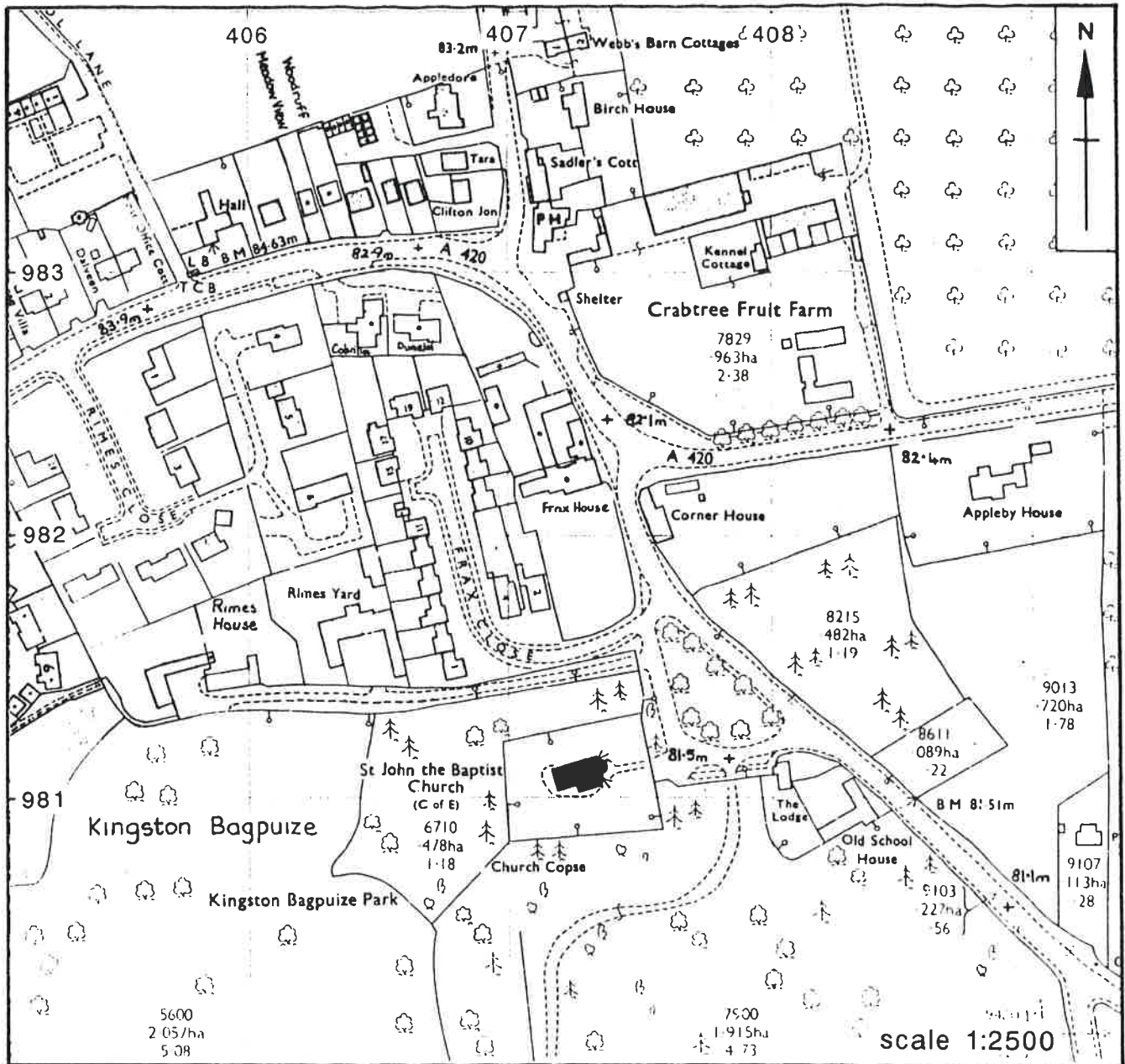
Trench & Context	Finds				
	Ceramics (see Appendix 3)	Building materials	Animal bone	Metal	Other
Trench 1					
1/001	2 x medieval earthenware 1 x post-medieval red earthenware 2 x flower pot 1 x white china	brick (or ?brick) - 2 x London Stock; 4 x ?brick slate - x 2 worked stone - x 1	-	non-ferrous -tubular object - possibly optical instrument - unidentified alloy tube and glass lenses (2 frags)	window glass x 2 vessel glass - 4 x clear, incl. 1 x milk bottle? 3 x white, incl moulded fragt. cinder/slag x 3
1/002	1 x medieval earthenware 1 x post-med red earthenware	-	-	-	-
1/003	36 x medieval earthenware 1 x post-med red earthenware 1 x salt glaze cup 1 x stoneware jar	tile - 4 x Minety type fabric 1 x Minety type tradition brick (or ?brick) x 5 ?floor tile x 1 mortar/plaster x 2	caprine (sheep) - 2 x humerus (1 with dog gnawing) 1 x radius 1 x tooth cow - 1 x humerus (cut marks) 1 x ?humerus, fragt cow size - 1 x rib UNID x 3	iron - nails x 2	clay tobacco pipe - 2 x stems
Trench 2					
2/001	1 x post-med red earthenware	-	-	-	-
2/002	7 x medieval earthenware 2 x post-med red earthenware	-	cow - 1 x scapula 1 x mandible (calf) horse - 1 x 2nd phalanx caprine (sheep) - 1 x radius 1 x metatarsal pig - 1 x humerus UNID - 1 x ?radius 2 x femur frags 10 x frags	-	clay tobacco pipe - 2 x stems
2/004	2 x medieval earthenware	-	-	-	vessel glass - 1 x ? bottle
2/005	1 x medieval earthenware 2 x post-med red earthenware	-	-	-	vessel glass - 1 x ? bottle
2/006	9 x medieval earthenware	-	caprine - 1 x tibia pig - 1 x humerus (v large) UNID - rib frags x 5	iron - tumbler lock key (sf 1)	-

Appendix 3 - Pottery summary

Trench	Context	Fabric code	No of sherds	Weight (gm)	Earliest date	Latest date	Description/Comments
1	1/001	OXY	1	10	late 11th c	mid 13th c	early medieval ware
		OXAQ	1	2	late 12th c	late 14th/ early 15th c ?	East Wiltshire-type ware
		GREW	1	4	17th c	early 19th c	glazed red earthenware
		WHCHINA	1	2	19th c	20th c	modern white china
		FLP/REW	2	18	19th c	20th c	flower pot
	1/002	GREW	1	22	17th c	early 19th c	glazed red earthenware - base of pancheon or bowl
		OXAW	1	16	mid/late 13th c	early 14th c	coarse Brill/Boarstall ware - decorated with incised circles - ⊙ ⊙ ⊙ - same jug as OXAW sherd from 1/003
	1/003	OXAQ	23	180	late 12th c	late 14th/ early 15th c	East Wiltshire-type ware, incl 3 cooking pot rims
		OXY	2	10	late 11th c	mid 13th c	early medieval ware, incl 1 glazed tripod pitcher = 12th century
		OXAM	3	24	13th c	15th c	fine Brill/Boarstall ware, incl glazed jug sherd
		OXAM	3	32	mid/late 13th c	early 14th c	incl 1 jug rim
		OXAG	3	10	mid 11th c	late 14th/15th c	Abingdon type A, incl 2 very dark burnt sherds
		OXAW	1	4	13th c	15th c	coarse Brill/Boarstall ware - same jug as decorated piece from 1/002
		?	1	8	14th c ?		white trailed slip fabric? medieval, possibly late medieval
		REW	1	12	17th c	18th c	red earthenware, jug rim
		SWSG	1	4	1720	1770	Staffordshire white salt glaze cup
ENST	1	22	18th c	19th c	English stoneware jar base		

Trench	Context	Fabric code	No of sherds	Weight (gm)	Earliest date	Latest date	Description/Comments
2	2/001	GREW	1	4	18th c	-	post-medieval mottled redware - local product
	2/002	OXAQ	4	20	late 12th c	late 14th/ early 15th c	East Wiltshire-type ware
		OXAM	3	12	13th c	15th c	fine Brill/Boarstall ware
		REW	2	86	17th c	18th c	red earthenware - large bowl
	2/004	OXAQ	2	16	late 12 th c	late 14th/ early 15th c	East Wiltshire-type ware
	2/005	OXAQ	1	8	late 12 th c	late 14th/ early 15th c	East Wiltshire-type ware
		OXDG	1	2	mid 16th c	18th c	post-medieval redware like Brill fabric
		GREW	1	52	16th c	18th c	glazed red earthenware - flanged dish rim
	2/006	OXAQ	6	118	late 12 th c	late 14th/ early 15th c	East Wiltshire-type ware
		OXY	3	50	late 11th c	mid 13th c	early medieval ware

Note: Fabric codes are based on the codes and fabric descriptions published in Haldon and Mellor in Durham 1977, Table 1, pp 114-20 supplemented by those in Haldon and Parrington in Parrington and Bakewill 1975, pp30-33.



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Figure 1

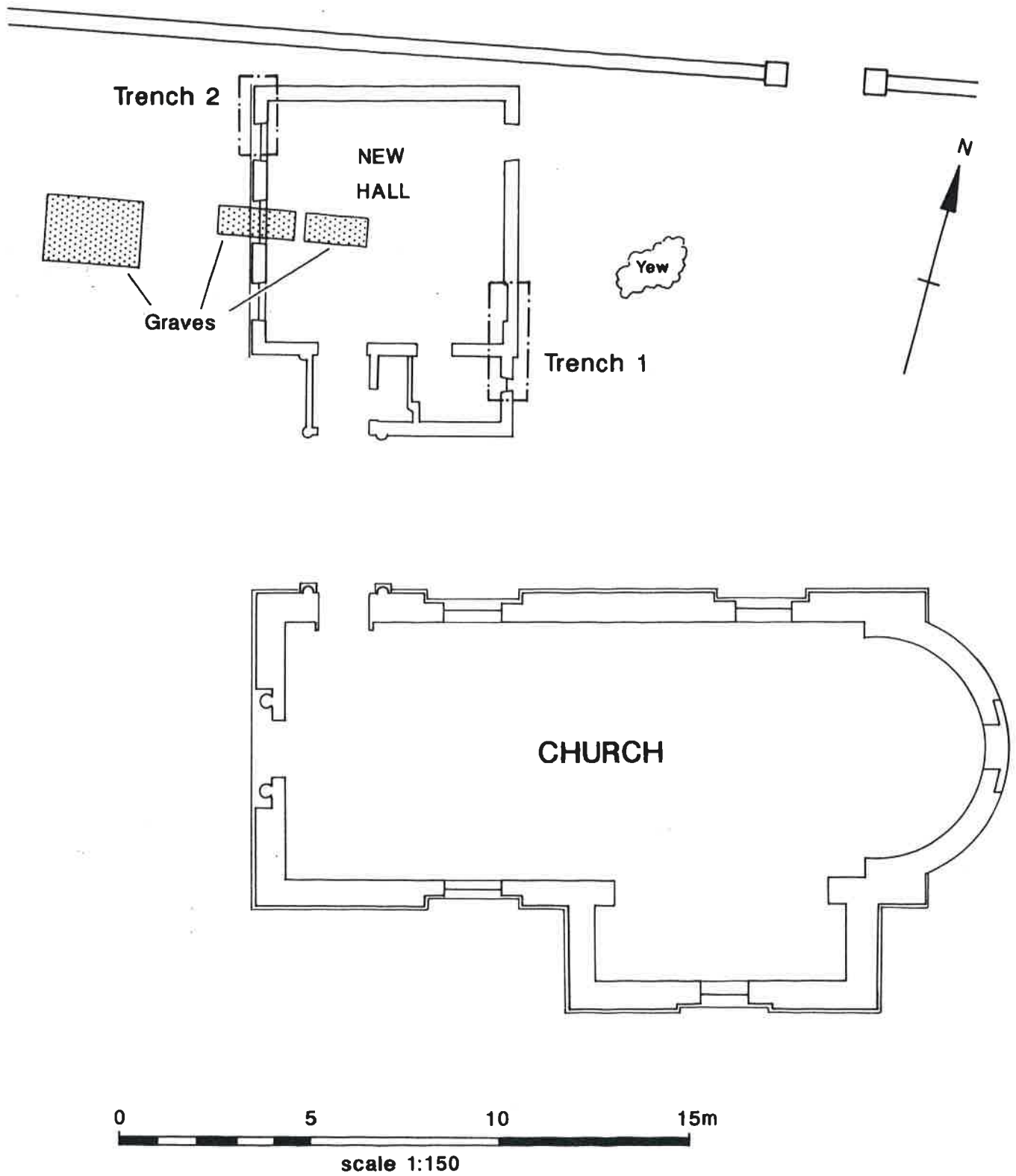
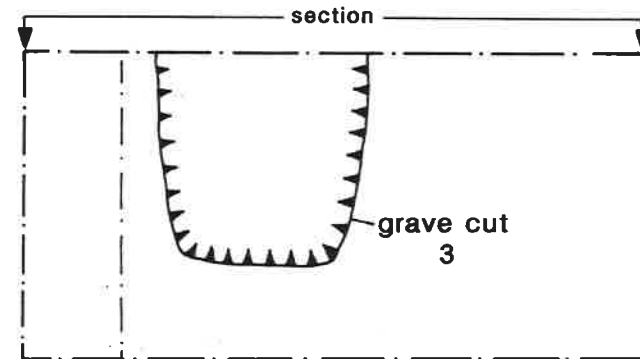


Figure 2

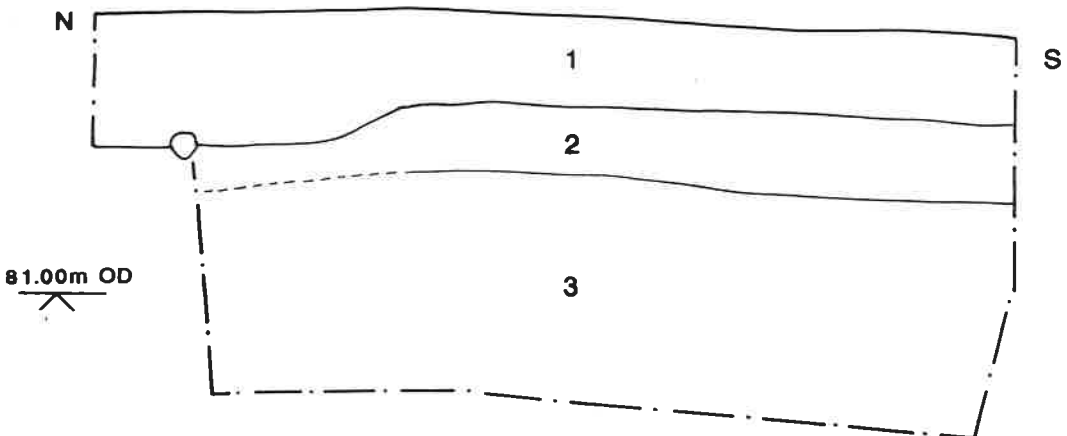
Trench 1 plan



Trench 2 plan



section



section

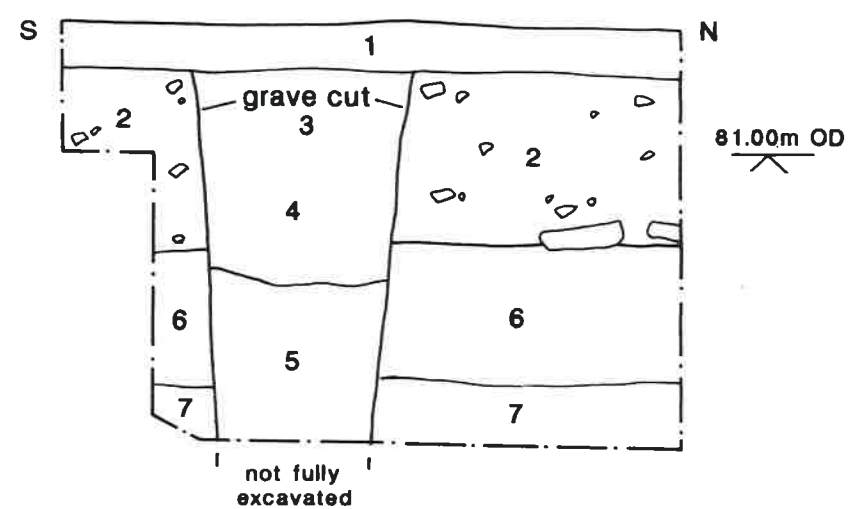


Figure 3



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