

**Oxford Archdeaconry: Aston and Cuddesdon Deanery**

**ST LEONARD'S CHURCH, WATLINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE**

*NGR SU 6845 9480*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**April 2001**

Oxford Archdeaconry: Aston and Cuddesdon Deanery

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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## **Summary**

*In January 2001 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Leonard Church, Watlington, Oxfordshire. During the installation of a new floor within the church, a west-east aligned inhumation and a brick structure were partially exposed - the inhumation was left in situ as no further impact would be made. Evidence for the refurbishment of the Church in 1877 was also recorded in the form of brick floor supports and a deposit of lime mortar. Following the reduction of the existing path from the south porch to the lynch gate, a number of burials were recorded, two of which were excavated and re-interred prior to the deposition of hardcore for the new path. The remainder were left in situ as they were only subject to minimal impact from the ground reduction.*

## **1. Introduction**

The Church is located to the west of the village of Watlington, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 6845 9480) adjacent to the junction of Cuxham Road and Pyrton Lane (Figs 1 and 2).

## **2 Background**

St Leonard Church was almost completely rebuilt in 1877 by HJ Tollit and Edwin Dolby. However, surviving features (such as the plain arch in the modern vestry) indicate that the church dates from as early as the 12th century. There is also evidence for substantial alterations in the 14th century (notably the south arcade of the Nave), and again in the 15th century (the south chapel and west tower).

## **3 Aims**

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

## **4 Methodology**

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilised standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 Interior Groundwork**

The installation of the new floor involved the removal of the existing floor surface and the fitting of six concrete plinths to support the new floor. The removal of the floor revealed a course of bricks (5 - Fig. 3) which acted as a support, and an

underlying deposit of lime mortar which seals any archaeological remains beneath. The floor support (5) and the lime mortar probably date to the 1877 refurbishment.

Installation of the new concrete plinths involved the excavation of six 1 m<sup>2</sup> trenches. The first two of these (Figs 3 and 4) were dug to a depth of approximately 0.8 m below the existing ground level and revealed an inhumation and a brick structure (see Trench 1 and Trench 2 respectively). To minimise the archaeological impact, the remaining trenches were redesigned to a shallower depth and did not impact on deposits below the lime mortar. The results from Trenches 1 and 2 are described below.

#### **5.1.1 Trench One (Figs 3 and 4)**

Directly underlying the lime mortar was a make up layer comprising a loose, dark grey silty clay deposit with 15% gravel and stones and 1% ceramic building material (10). This overlay a tenacious light grey clay deposit (4) which was cut by a west-east aligned grave (1) containing an adult burial, of which only the skull and shoulders were revealed, the skull was 0.65 m below ground level. The backfill of the grave was a mixed deposit of light grey clay and dark brown silty clay with 1% stones and gravel (2). The burial was recorded in plan (Fig. 3) and left in-situ as no further impact would be made. No dating evidence was recovered.

#### **5.1.2 Trench Two (Figs 3 and 4)**

Trench 2 revealed the upper course of a brick structure (8) which lay within a construction cut (9) that also truncated deposit 4, and appeared to pre-date the existing floor surface. While it is possible that this structure represented a brick vault, it has been tentatively interpreted as a brick plinth supporting a pre-1877 floor surface.

### **5.2 Exterior Groundwork**

The construction of a new path from the south porch of the Church to the existing lynch gate involved the removal and reduction of the present path which was already considerably worn into a hollow (Fig. 5). At least six grave cuts and partially exposed skeletons were observed during the reduction and the positions of the exposed graves were planned (Fig. 6). It was necessary to excavate two of the exposed burials (Fig. 7)

#### **5.2.1 Reduced Dig for the New Path**

The groundwork for the new path comprised the reduction and widening of the existing path. Immediately underlying the existing path was a 0.15 m thick deposit of 'hardcore' consisting of gravel, brick rubble and chalk and flint in a silty clay matrix (22) which partially truncated the burials cut through the underlying deposit (21). Deposit 21 comprised a mid-light brownish grey silty clay with 2-3% charnal. This deposit appeared to represent the archaeological horizon as the graves observed were cut through it. Both graves (16 and 18) were backfilled with a mixed deposit of light grey silty clay (re-deposited 21) and a mid-dark brown silty clay (17 and 19 respectively). On either side of the existing path, the topsoil (23) appeared to directly overlie deposit 21 and was a maximum of 0.20 m thick.

The skeletons (15 and 20) were 0.30 m below the surface of the existing path and had been partially truncated during its construction. However, they were approximately 0.70 m below the top of the bank on either side of the sunken path. No dating evidence was recovered.

The other graves observed had also been partially truncated by the construction of the existing path and also by a service trench which was present along the length of the new path (Fig. 6).

## **6 Finds**

No finds were retained during the watching brief. The excavated skeletons and the associated charnal were re-buried prior to the installation of the new path.

## **7 Environmental results**

Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits and the very tight constraints of the excavation, no environmental soil samples were taken.

## **8 Discussion**

The characterisation of deposit 4 was problematic given the restricted nature of the groundwork. It is possible that this is a layer of made ground associated with the construction of the south aisle of the 12th-century church, although no dating evidence was recovered. It is also possible that deposit 4 is the natural clay but the deposit was not observed over a sufficient area to clarify this.

However, it is likely that deposit 4 and the deposit (21) observed during the reduction of the existing path are one and the same. This would imply that deposit 4 is not localised within the Church and that it may represent the natural clay which has been heavily truncated by graves.

The brick structure observed in trench two has been interpreted as a probable support for an earlier floor surface, presumably that which existed before the refurbishment in 1877, although it is possible that it represented a vault.

No dating evidence was recovered from the grave revealed in Trench 1 and no further conclusions could be drawn as to the date of the burial, although it was truncated by the construction cut (7) for the brick floor support (5) and is therefore likely to pre-date the 1877 renovation (see above)

The skeletons excavated outside the Church were both of west-east orientation, adult and of indeterminate sex. No dating evidence was retrieved from either grave. The excavated skeletons were reburied before being covered by the new path.

No significant archaeological deposits were revealed or disturbed by the excavation of the other four trenches within the Church.

### **References.**

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



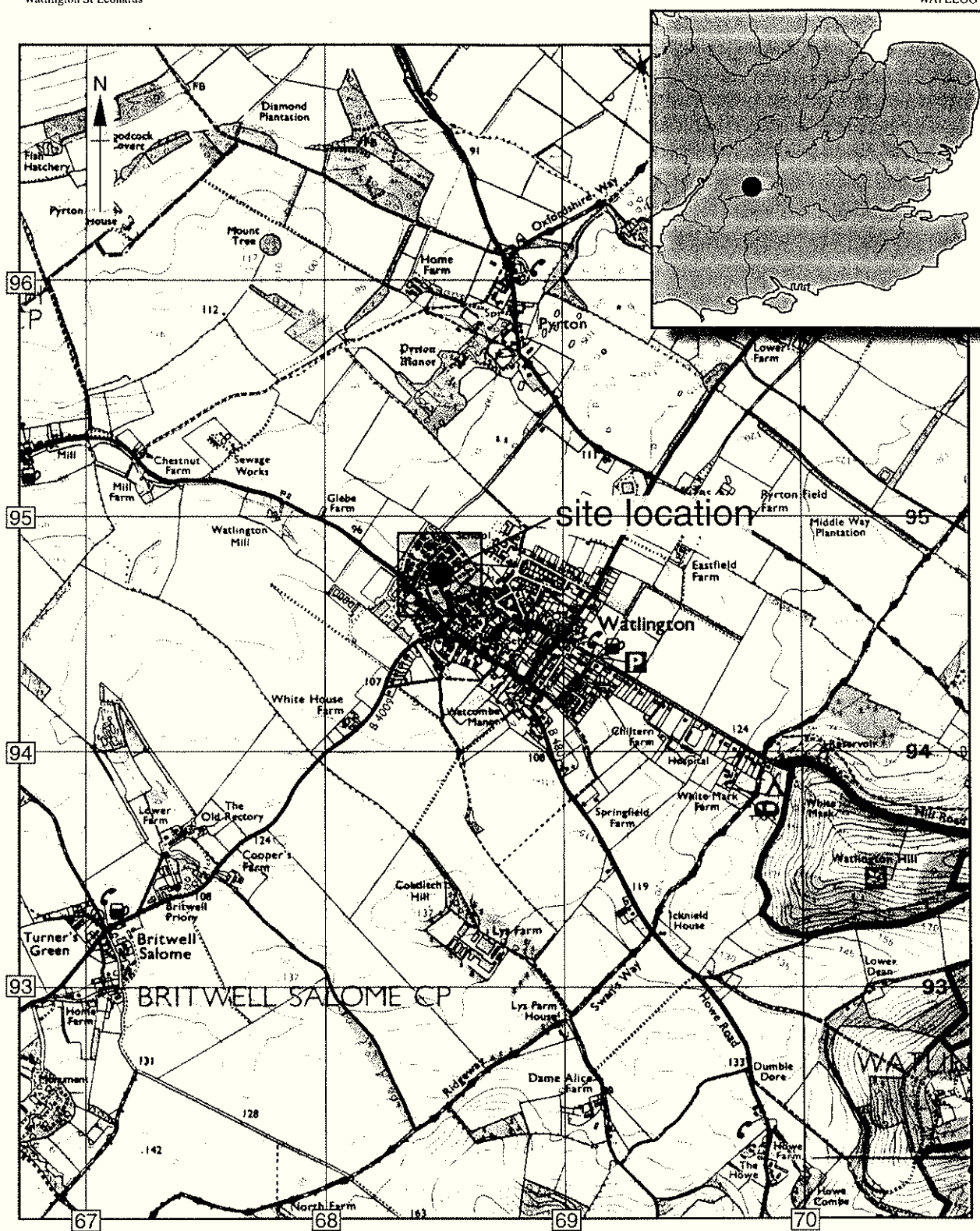
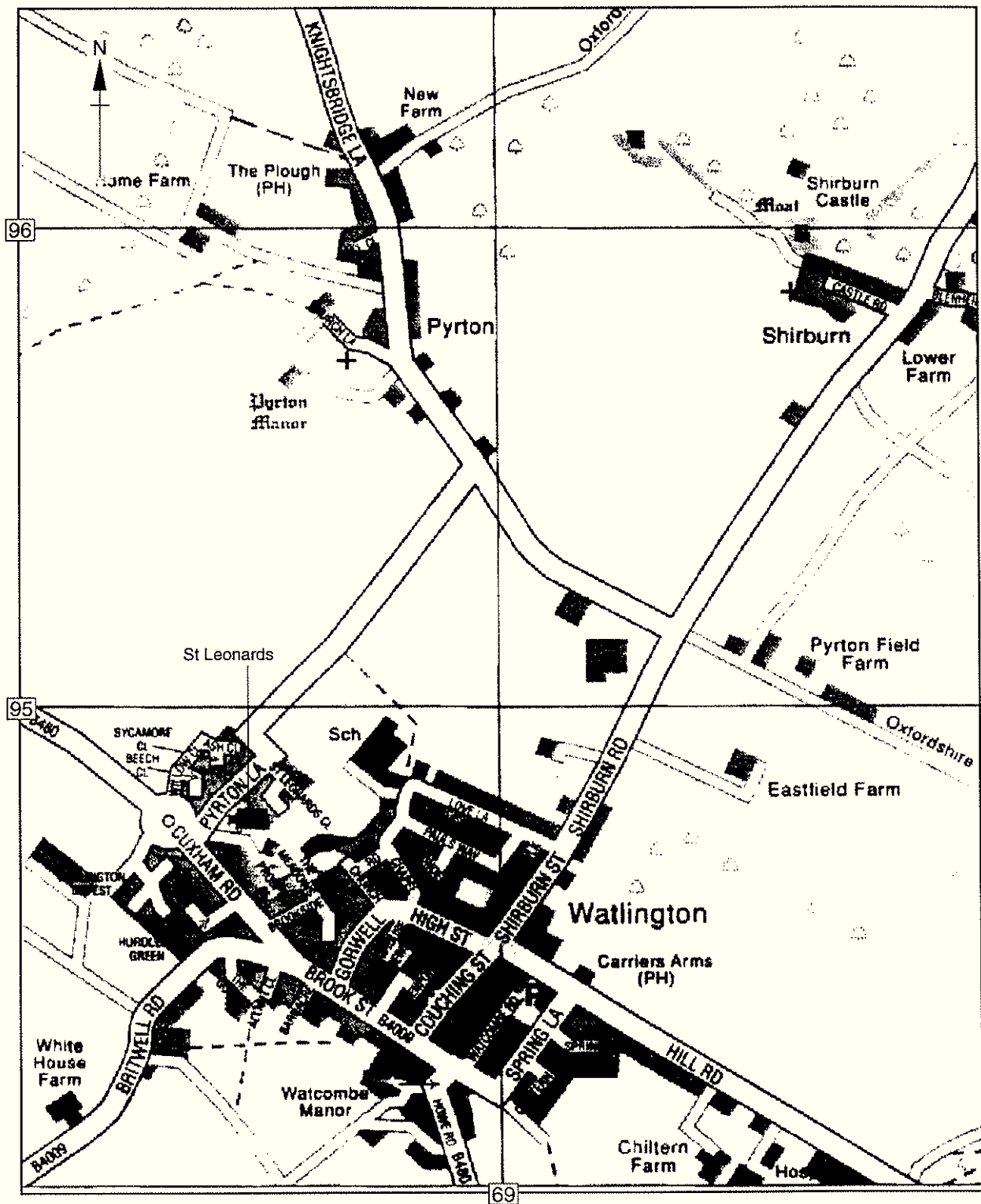


Figure 1: Site location.



Scale 1:12,500

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Figure 2 : Location of trenches.



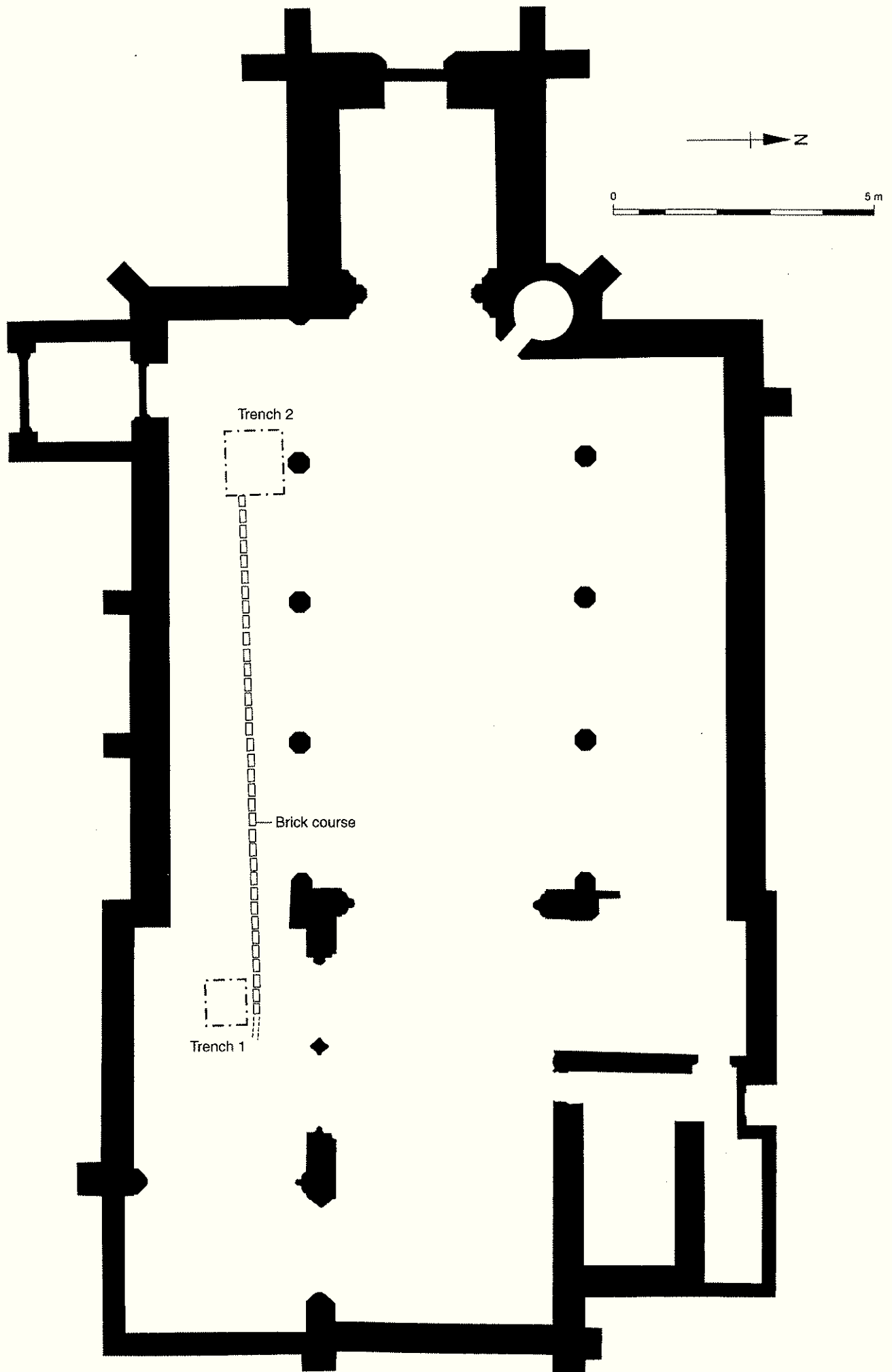


Figure 3 : Plan of trenches 1 and 2.

Figure 4 : Trench 1

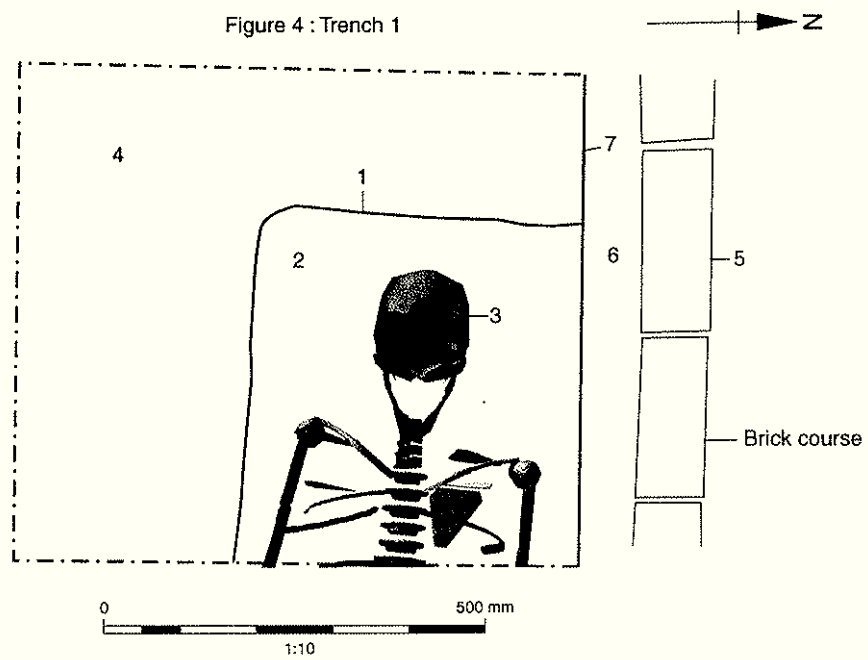


Figure 4 : Trench 2

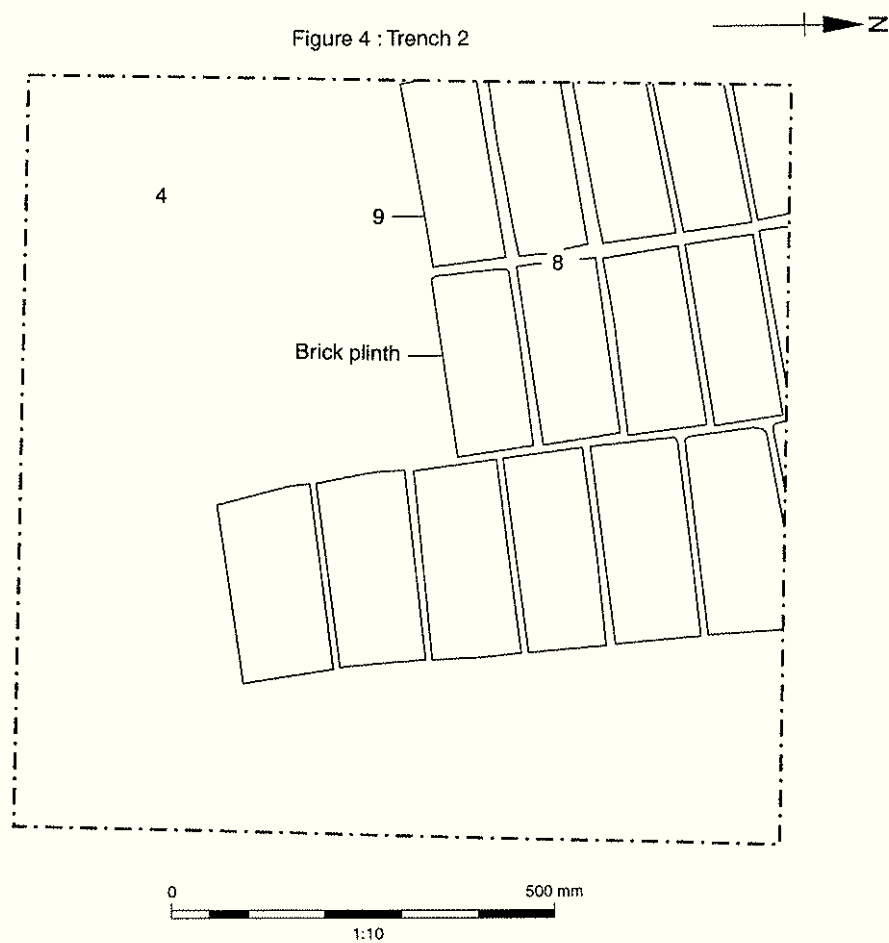


Figure 4 : Plans of trenches 1 and 2.

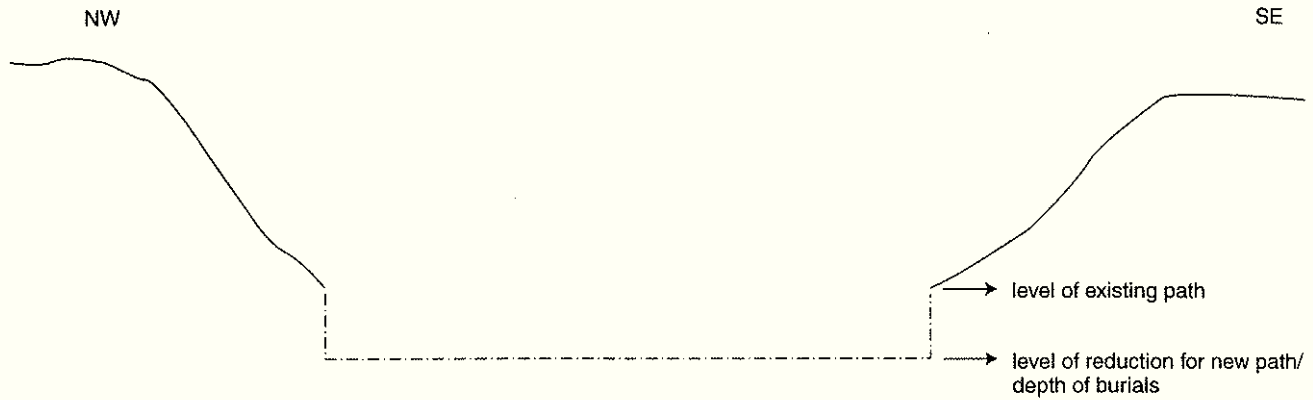


Figure 5 : profile of sunken path and depth of burials.

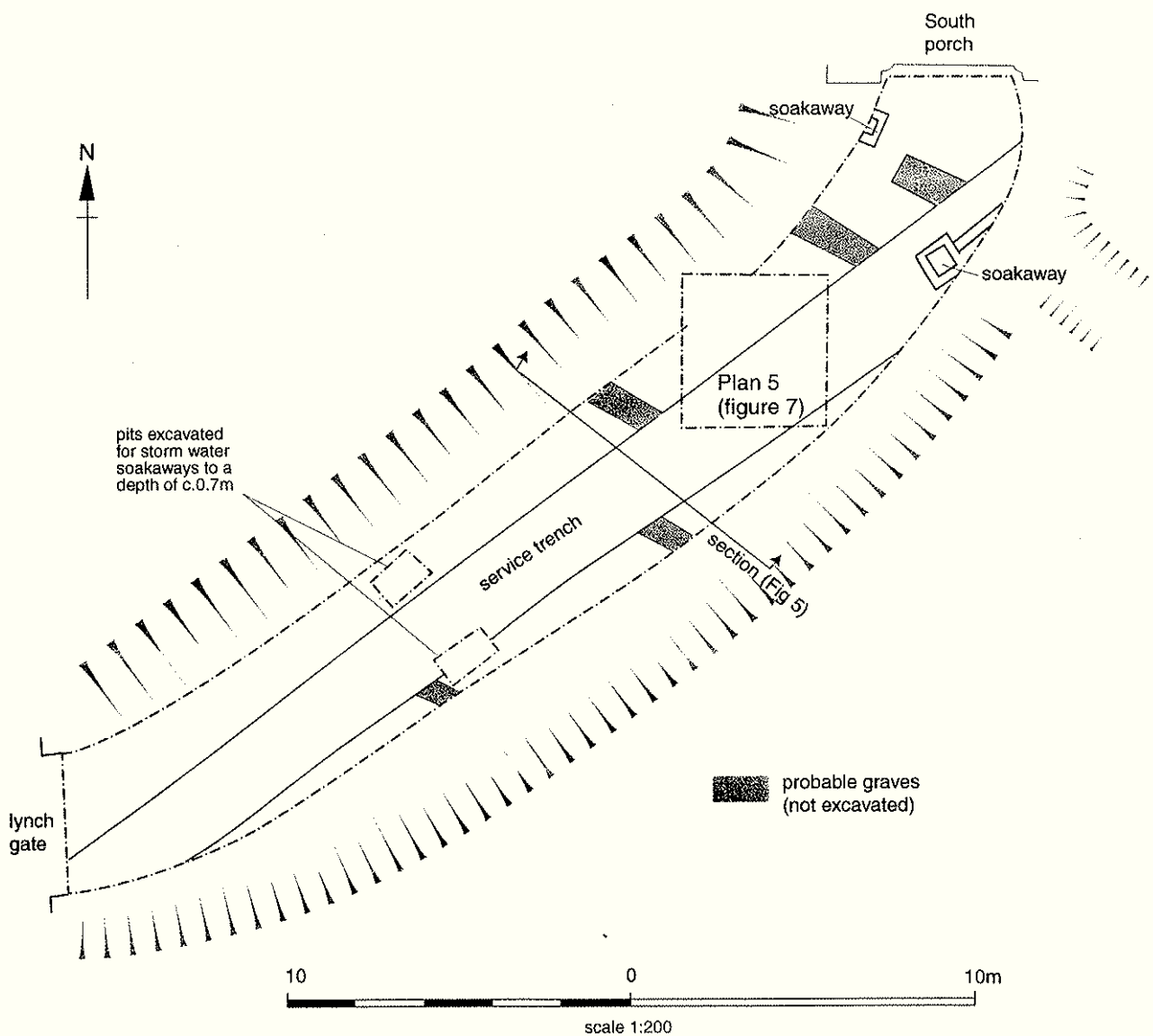


Figure 6 : Plan showing exposed grave cuts after reduction for new path.

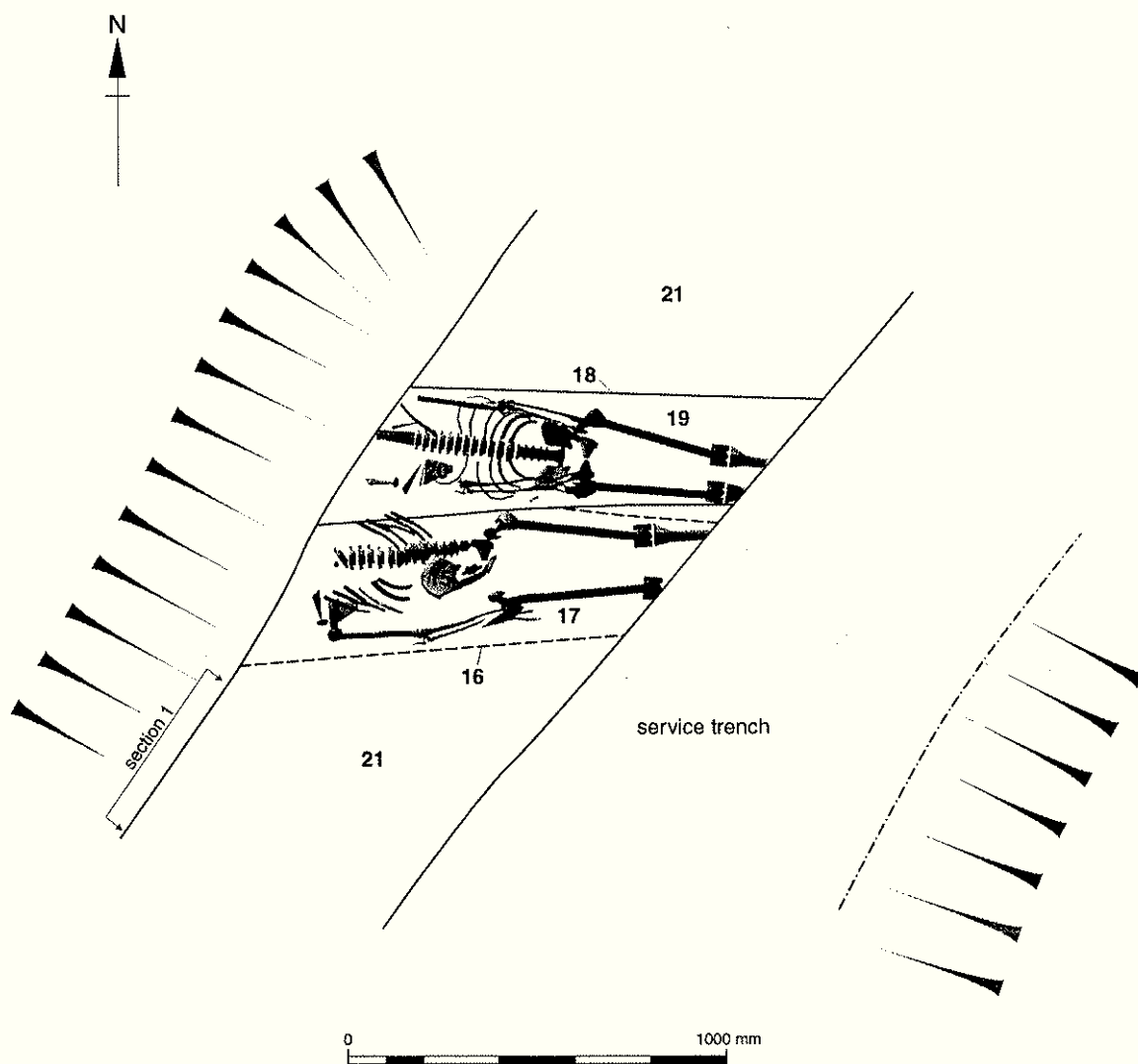


Figure 7 : Plan of excavated burials.



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