

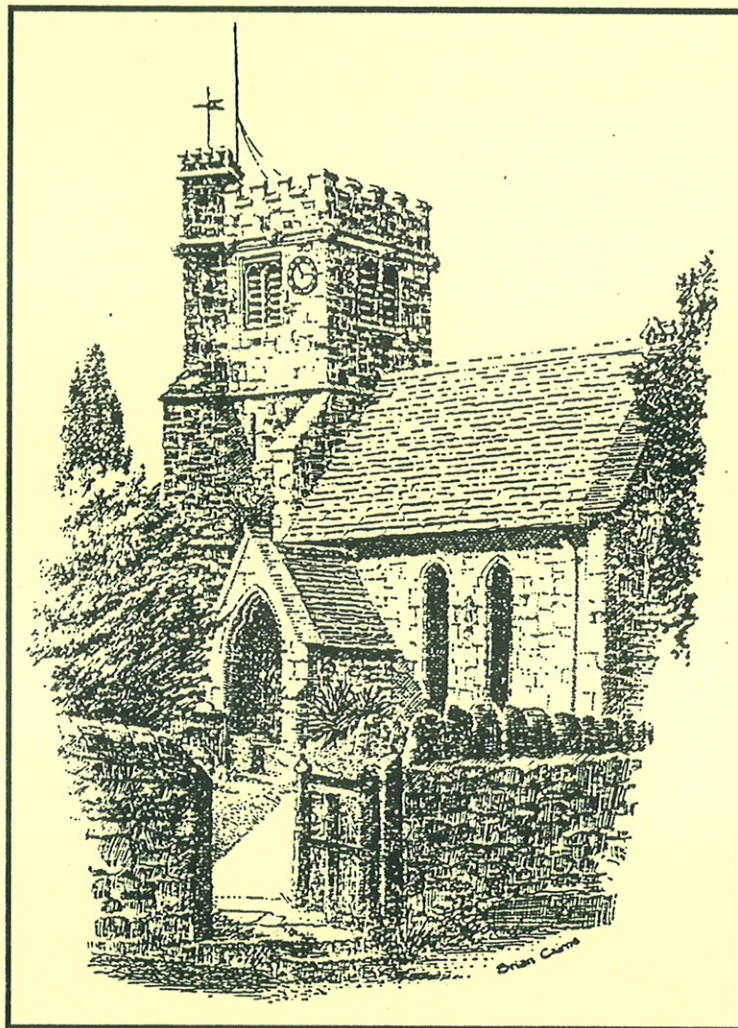
J. HILLER

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St. Andrew's Church, Headington, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 5445 0764

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1997

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, HEADINGTON, OXFORD
NGR SP 5445 0764
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 SUMMARY

Building work at St. Andrews Church, Headington was monitored by the Oxford Archaeological Unit during an extended watching brief in 1997. Graveyard soil including disarticulated human bones was observed in a number of foundation pits. Three brick vaults of 18th or 19th century date and the foundations of the 19th century north aisle were recorded. Residual medieval pottery was recovered from some of the churchyard soil horizons.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) maintained a watching brief during building work at St. Andrew's Church, Headington, Oxford (Fig. 1) in 1997, during the construction of an extension to the north of the present vestry. Further building work east of the vestry was also monitored. Plans for the new buildings were drawn up by Carden and Godfrey, Architects of Long Acre, London. Foundation trenches, pits and service runs excavated by the contractors were monitored for the presence of features and finds.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St. Andrew's is the parish church of Old Headington, and dates to the Norman period. The church has a chancel arch of c. 1160, and the building was enlarged by a south aisle and south tower in the 13th century. The chancel was rebuilt c. 1400. In 1862 J.C. Buckler lengthened the nave further, and in 1880 the north aisle was added by Wilkinson (Pevsner and Sherwood, 336-7).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

There have been some prehistoric finds in the parish of Headington, although there is greater evidence of Roman settlement in the area. Roman pottery kiln sites have been identified at Headington Wick (NGR SP 549089), Headington, Poor's Land (NGR SP 562094) and in Old Headington (NGR SP 543077). The Roman road from Alchester to Dorchester crossed the eastern end of the parish. The name Headington is derived from a Saxon personal name 'Hedena', and the village may have been more important in Saxon and Norman times than in later periods. The only trace of this period is the foundations of an ancient building known as 'Ethelred's Palace' in Court Close, which adjoins Manor Farm. In Domesday the village is referred to as 'Hedintone'. The village of Old Headington, so called to distinguish it from the modern suburbs which surround it, contains many stone-built houses of the 17th and 18th centuries (Lobel, 157-168).

Headington once lay within the forest of Shotover and Stowood, and is situated on high ground overlying the upper Corallian beds and sandy uplands. The geology

beneath St. Andrew's Church consists of sediments mapped as the Beckley Sands Member, which belongs to the Corallian Formation. These sediments are c. 15-20 m thick, and are composed of calcareous sands with occasional sandstone beds.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 2)

The construction of an extension (Parish Room) to the north of the present church involved the excavation by the contractors of eight deep pits (A-H, generally 1.7 m deep and 1.5 - 2 m wide) which formed the ground plan of the new building. These pits were linked with ground beam trenches dug to a general depth of 0.5 m. All of the foundation pits were shored after excavation for safety reasons, such that only limited investigation of some of the pit sides was possible. The spoil from the pits was checked for finds.

5.1 PITS A, B, AND C

Natural sand (109) was observed at the base of each pit. A 1.3-1.4 m thick layer of mixed grey-brown sandy silt (112 = 113 = 116) overlaid the natural. The layer contained occasional pieces of disarticulated human bone. In the north facing section of pit B, parts of three human skulls were observed within layer 113. The skulls were not damaged by the excavations. A quantity of loose human bones were present in layer 113, indicating that graves had been intercut a number of times in this area of the graveyard.

5.2 PITS D, E, AND H

Formal investigation of these pits was prevented by the shoring of the holes.

5.3 PITS F AND G

Pit F (Fig. 3) was excavated adjacent to a buttress beside the north wall of the vestry. In the north face of the pit above the natural sand was a 0.3 m thick layer of mixed light grey clay silt (108). This soil was similar to the general churchyard soil seen in pits A-C, although it was noticeably of lesser thickness. On the south side of the pit section was a 0.5 m thick deposit of concrete and gravel (110) which presumably acted as foundation material for buttress (100). The buttress was constructed of well hewn ashlar blocks bonded with cement and laid in stretcher courses. The base of the buttress was butted by a 0.8 m thick deposit of mid-dark grey silty clay (105) which contained lumps of mortar, charcoal and limestone pieces. The layer probably represented the backfill of the construction trench for the Victorian North Aisle.

Layer 105 was cut by 107, a vertical sided pit of unknown purpose. The pit was at least 0.9 m deep and had a diameter of 0.85 m. The fill of the pit, 106, was a mixed light grey-brown clay silt which contained mortar fragments but was otherwise a clean and undated deposit. The fill of 107 was overlain by 104, a 0.38 m thick layer of mixed light brown clay loam with brick fragments. This modern layer was cut by the a shallow trench (111) which contained a ceramic drain pipe

(101) of 20th century date. The latest deposits in the sequence here were the turf and topsoil (102) and the present stone pathway.

Pit G was also located against a buttress on the north side of the church. Above the natural sand (109) was a 0.4 m thick layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (114), which may represent an earlier ground surface although the deposit was undated. Above layer 114 was a yellow-grey brown layer of sandy clay silt which included brick and mortar fragments and lenses of sand (115). This layer was similar to layer 105 in pit F, and was probably associated with the construction of the north aisle. Layer 115 was overlain by the topsoil 102.

5.4 GROUND BEAM TRENCHES AND SEWER TRENCH

The foundation pits were linked by ground beam trenches which were dug to a depth of 0.5 m. No archaeological features or deposits were observed within these trenches. Three brick burial vaults (117, 118, 119) were observed during the course of the excavation of the sewer trench in the centre of the building. Vault 117 was constructed of red bricks bonded with cement, and the structure had an arched roof. The vault was 2.8 m long, 1.6 m wide and was at least 1.5 m tall. The blocked entrance to the vault was located at the east end of the east-west aligned structure.

Immediately east of 117 part of another brick tomb was identified. Tomb 118 was orientated east-west and had a roof capping of oolitic limestone. The full dimensions of the structure were not observed. Inhumations were present in both tombs; the remains were not disturbed.

A third east-west aligned tomb (119) was located during the excavation of a manhole associated with the sewer trench. The north side of the structure was observed, consisting of red bricks bonded with mortar and capped with a slab of oolitic limestone. The tombs were not securely dated but were probably built in the 18th or 19th century.

5.5 WORK EAST OF THE VESTRY, PITS I, J, AND K

A small building extension east of the vestry involved the excavation of three foundation pits. Pits J and K were dug to a depth of 1.7 m to natural sand through graveyard soil similar to that identified in pits A, B, and C. Pit I was excavated against the east face of the north-east corner buttress. The pit was 1.2 m deep, and was dug through layers similar to 114 and 115 seen in pit G.

6 THE FINDS

Medieval pottery was recovered from two contexts: three pottery sherds of glazed Brill-Boarstall ware were present in layer 113 in pit B. These sherds date to the 14th or 15th century. A single sherd of medieval pottery (12th century or later) and a sherd of ?medieval tile were recovered from layer 105 in pit F. Layer 112 in pit A produced two fragments of animal bone and two ?iron nail fragments. The

mixed nature of the soil in the churchyard means that the finds are likely to be residual. Modern finds including drainpipe and brick fragments were not retained.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The presence of disarticulated human bones in churchyard soil horizons is not uncommon; these usually derive from the practise of cutting and re-cutting graves through time, with the result that the earlier burials are disturbed. The bones will be reinterred in the churchyard. No 'in situ' burials were observed. The brick vaults were not opened and the remains were not disturbed. The vaults date to the 18th or 19th century, and require no further comment. No datable archaeological soil horizons or features were revealed during these excavations. The medieval pottery is likely to be residual, in post-medieval deposits.

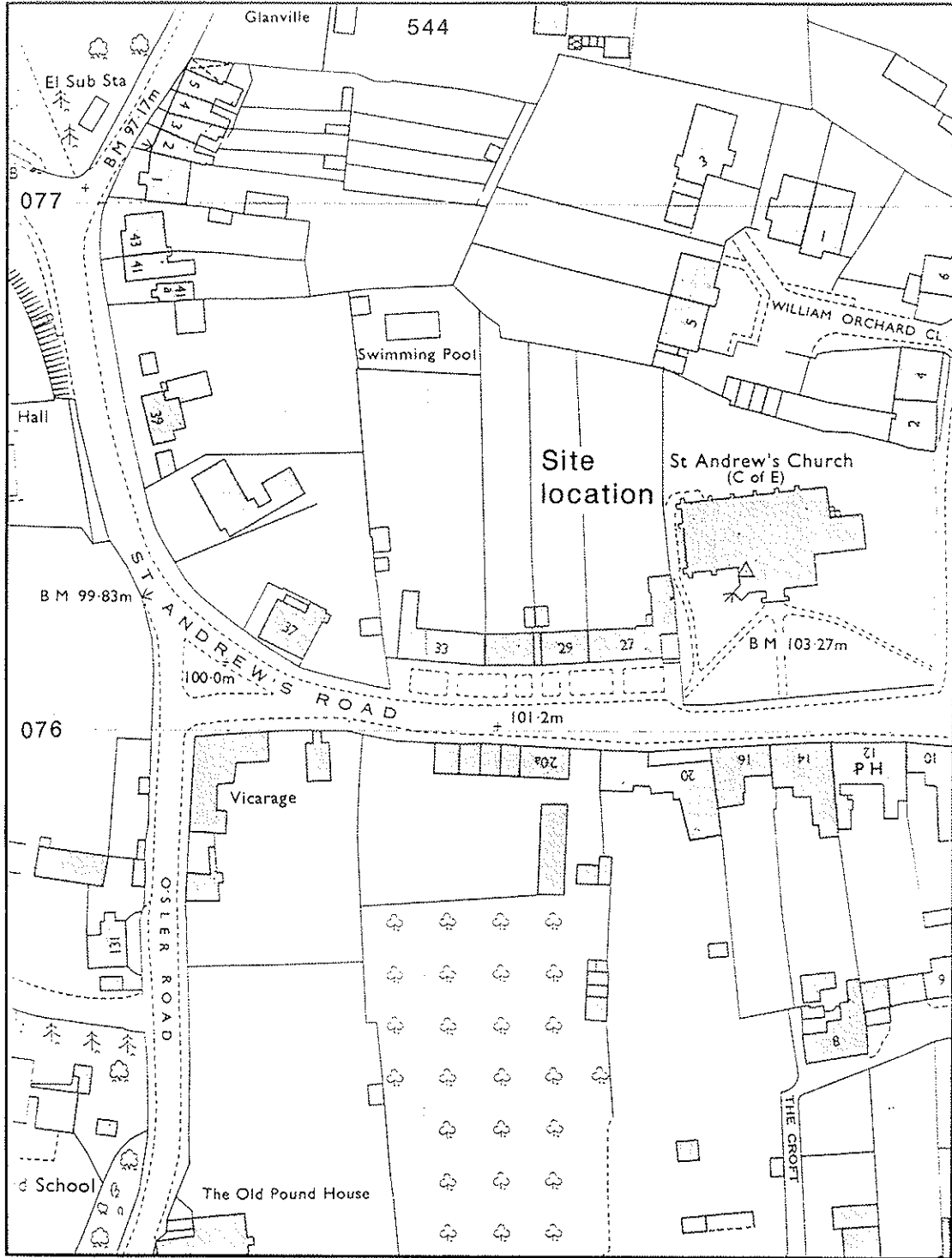
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June 1997

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- Pevsner N., and Sherwood. J, 1974 *Oxfordshire, Buildings of England*
- Rimarch Ltd., 1996 Geotechnical and Environmental Division, 1996, *Consulting Engineers (report) on behalf of St. Andrew's Church PCC*, for Price and Myers Consulting Engineers

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

Context	Type	Depth/ Height	Width	Comments
100	Structure	-	1.16 m	19th century buttress
101	Service	-	0.14 m	20th century service pipe
102	Layer	0.06 m	-	Topsoil and turf
103	Layer	0.08 m	-	Paving stones for path
104	Layer	0.36 m	-	Mixed soil horizon below topsoil
105	Layer/ fill	0.9 m	-	Soil probably filling construction trench for 19th century north aisle extension
106	Fill	0.9 m+	-	Soil fill of modern cut feature, ?borehole pit
107	Cut	0.9 m+	0.8 m	Cut for modern borehole pit filled by 106
108	Layer	0.3 m	-	Soil layer below 107
109	Layer	0.65 m+	-	Natural sand
110	Structure	1.0 m+	-	Foundation material for buttress 100
111	Cut	0.33 m+	0.44 m	Modern cut for drain 101
112	Layer	1.3 m	-	Graveyard soil in pit A
113	Layer	1.3 m	-	Graveyard soil in pit B
114	Layer	0.4 m	-	?ground level below construction soil 115 in pit G
115	Layer	0.4 m	-	Layer containing building debris over 114
116	Layer	1.4 m	-	Layer of graveyard soil in pit C
117	Structure	1.5 m	1.6 m	Brick tomb, ?Victorian or later date, found along route of service trench
118	Structure	-	-	Closed tomb east of 117, found along route of service trench
119	Structure	-	-	Brick tomb NW of pit E, found along route of service trench



SP5407 NW
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Figure 1

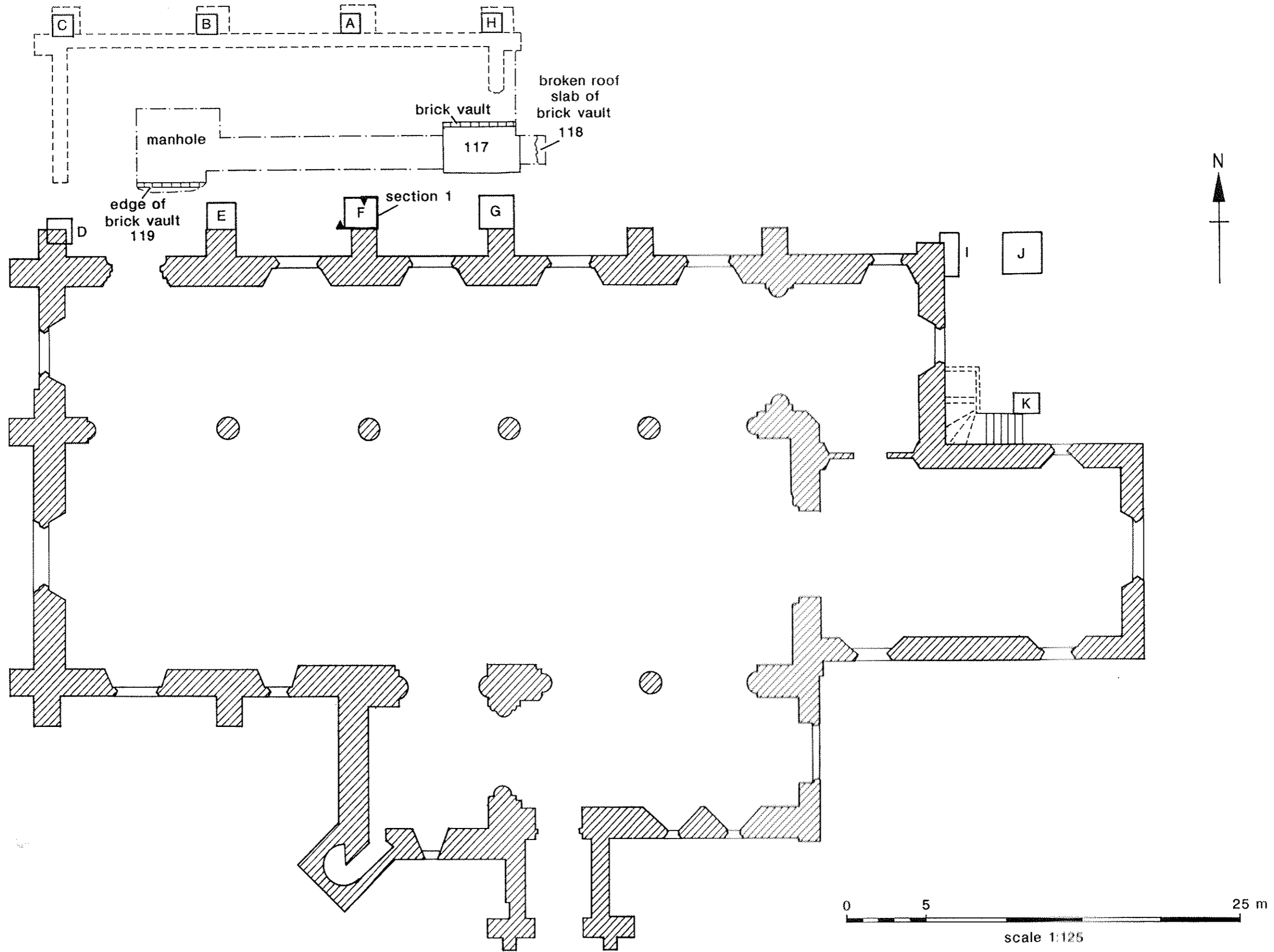


Figure 2

Hole F
section 1

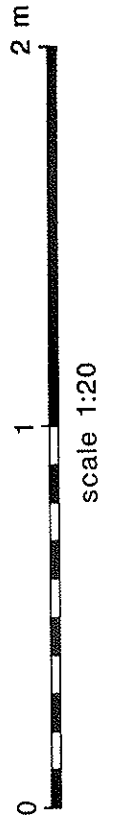
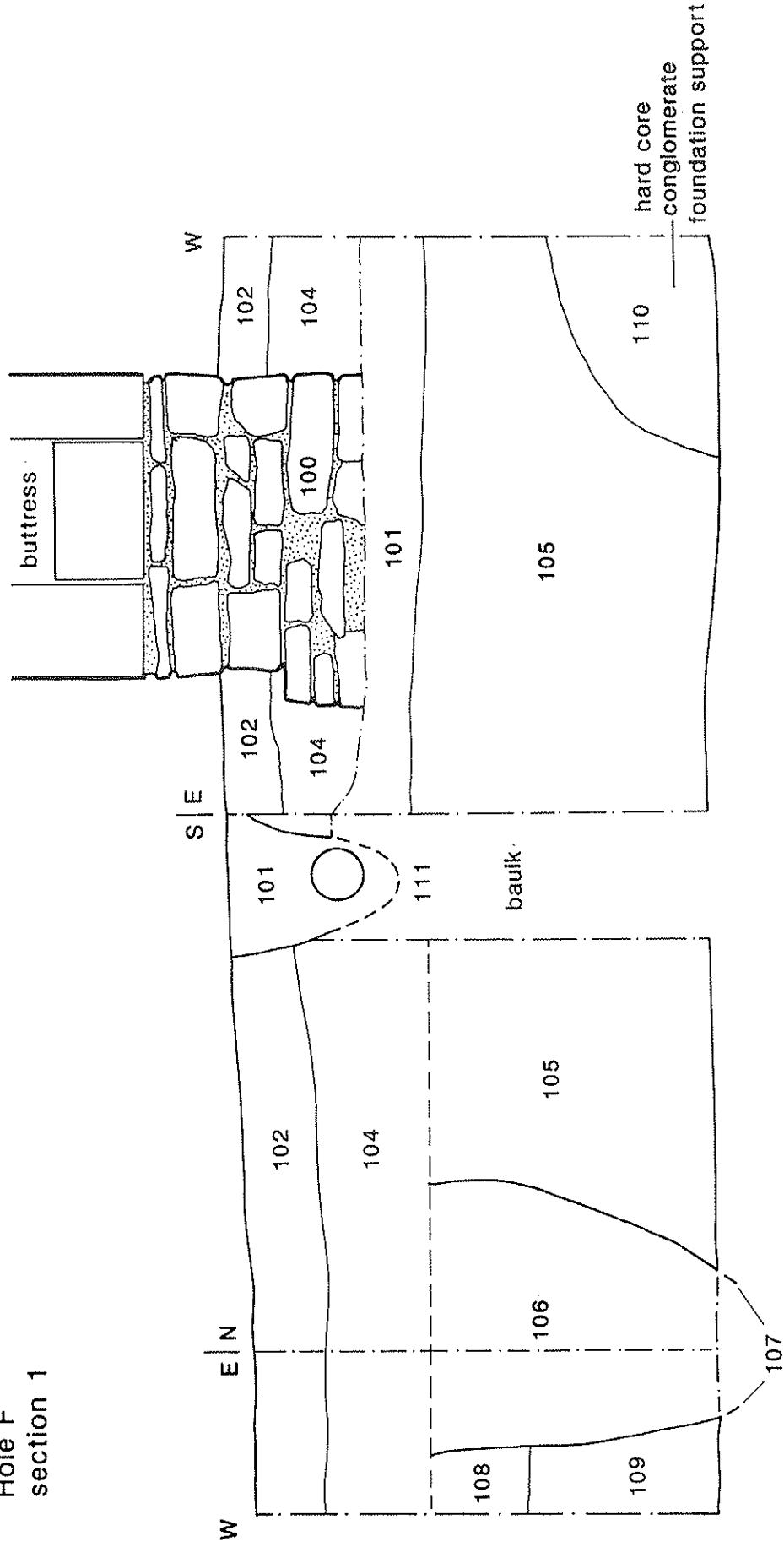


Figure 3



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