

St Leonards Church Grendon Underwood Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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**St LEONARDS CHURCH
GRENDON UNDERWOOD, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

NGR: SP 6772 2099

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SUMMARY

Between the 10th and 14th November 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation in the graveyard to the north of St Leonard's church, Grendon Underwood, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 6772 2099) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council. The evaluation revealed a sequence of medieval and possibly late Saxon activity against the north wall of the nave. This comprised the insertion of 3 graves into a buried medieval soil horizon sometime in the 12th to 13th centuries and possibly two phases of construction for buttresses in the 14th and possibly 15th centuries. Sherds of late Saxon pottery were recovered suggesting activity of that period in the vicinity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 St Leonard's Church is located within the village of Grendon Underwood, Buckinghamshire and is located at NGR SP 6772 2099.
- 1.1.2 The proposals for the church consist of an extension on the north side of the building for a new vestry. Plans for the scheme have been devised by Robert Montgomery Architects of Oxford. The proposal also envisages the insertion of a new door through the north wall of the nave in the location of trench 1.
- 1.1.3 The evaluation comprised the archaeological excavation of three small trenches adjacent to the church and located between the buttresses on the north side of the church (Fig. 2). The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the character and survival of any archaeological remains (either human or structural) on the north side of the present church, in order to inform on the proposed extension building works.
- 1.1.4 OA prepared a written scheme of investigation using historical background from Pevsner and Williamson's *Buildings of Buckinghamshire*, RCHME *Buckinghamshire Inventory Vol. II*, 1912-13, in response to a project brief prepared by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS 2003). Site visits were also made in July 2003 by an OA researcher. The site of the extension was examined by OA and the conclusion was that all marked graves within the area of the extension footprint were of 20th century date. No graves were noted adjacent to the church walls (OA 2003).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The Church of St Leonard's lies on flat ground at a height of 72 m OD. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay, (Fig. 1).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 St Leonard's church is built of stone rubble with ashlar facings to the buttresses. The roofs are covered with lead, except that of the chancel, which is tiled. The first documented record for the church dates to 1223 when the Bishop of Lincoln collated Robert Haliden of Banbury to the church. The nave was probably built in the 12th century and the south doorway inserted in about 1220. The chancel was rebuilt in the early 14th century with the west tower being added in the second half of the 15th century. Internally the church was restored in 1866 and external renovations undertaken in 1902. The north vestry is modern (Pevsner and Williamson, 1994; RCHME 1912-13, VCH 1969, IV).

- 1.3.2 The manor at Grendon Underwood was held by Boding, Constable to King Edward prior to 1066. The Domesday Book records that the land was held by Henry of Ferrers. The Manor was assessed at 2 hides with land for 8 ploughs comprising 1 hide and 3 ploughs in demesne and 12 villeins with 2 bordars having 5 ploughs. There were 4 slaves, pasture for 2 teams and a wood for 500 hogs, (Morris, 1978).
- 1.3.3 St Leonard has been associated with the native Cernunnos, god of hunting. This and the location of extensive woodland used for hunting in the area may suggest an early foundation for the church, perhaps representing continuity from the Romano - British period. Akerman Street lies 1 km to the south of the site, however, no significant finds of Roman date have been attributed to the village core, (Reed, 1979).
- 1.3.4 An earthwork platform lies immediately to the west of the churchyard and is identified as the possible location of the manor house. Two moated sites lie a few hundred metres to the north and west of the church and further earthworks associated with the shrunken village are recorded to the east and south.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, and state of preservation of any archaeological remains surviving on the site.
- 2.1.2 Attention was to be given to remains of all periods. This was to include evidence for past environments, with provision for environmental sampling included.
- 2.1.3 The evaluation would seek to clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site.
- 2.1.4 The results of the evaluation were to be made available in the form of a written report.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The project brief required that three small test pits/trial trenches were to be excavated adjacent to the north wall of the nave. These were to be excavated initially by mini-Kubota, with excavation by hand when archaeological deposits were reached.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 Trench 1: This trench was excavated, initially by Kubota to remove topsoil and then by hand. The trench measured 2.5 m by 2 m, and was excavated to the first archaeological horizon.
- 3.2.2 Trench 2: This trench was excavated, initially by Kubota to remove topsoil/gravel deposits and then by hand. The trench measured 2 m by 2 m, and was excavated to the first archaeological horizon.
- 3.2.3 Trench 3: This trench measured 1 m by 2 m and was excavated, initially by Kubota to remove topsoil, and then by hand down to the first archaeological horizon.
- 3.2.4 A contingency of 2 m by 2 m of further trenching was included in the event of investigations required to clarify outstanding archaeological problems, to be agreed with the BCAS and

architect. This was undertaken from the north-west corner of Trench 1 to include an area within the footprint of the proposed new vestry, (Fig. 2).

3.2.5 Burials of archaeological significance were left *in-situ*

3.2.6 A plan has been produced locating current extant graves/gravestones around the church. Any new burials discovered in the course of the works were added to this plan.

3.2.7 Archaeological features were recorded in plan (1:20) and where appropriate in section (1:10). A full B/W photographic and colour transparency record was made of the work, to include all contexts (i.e. walls, floors, burials or *in-situ* artefacts). In addition a series of photographs were taken using a digital camera.

3.2.8 A representative sample of the features revealed were excavated by hand to determine their depth, extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. Where finds were visible in the surface of unexcavated features these were retained. All features and deposits encountered were issued a unique context number. All recording was conducted in accordance with the practices detailed in the OA Fieldwork Manual (OAU, 1992).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the course of the evaluation.

3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 A general description of the soils and ground conditions is given. This is followed by descriptions of the individual trenches and finds, with a brief discussion of the results. Details of individual contexts are given in Appendix 1.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.2 The three test pits uncovered a uniform topsoil averaging 0.2 m in depth overlying a greyish yellow silty clay subsoil, 0.15 m thick, with small tile and limestone inclusions. This subsoil overlay the first archaeological horizon identified by a buried soil and foundation cuts for the buttresses. The natural geology, comprising Oxford Clay was encountered 0.8 m below the present ground surface.

4.3 A series of modern drains ran along the west side of all three trenches from downpipes and fed into a drain running along the northern extent of the excavated area.

4.4 Distribution of archaeological deposits

- 4.4.1 All three test pits contained archaeological features and finds comprising up to three burials, a buried medieval soil horizon and wall and buttress footings within foundation trenches, (Fig. 3). Pottery was recovered from deposits within all three trenches.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

- 5.1.1 The test pits demonstrated a level of uniformity of deposits and will be discussed together below.

5.1.2 *The North Wall*

- 5.1.3 The foundations for the north wall of the nave were investigated in all three trenches (500, 501 and 503). The foundation was uncovered to a depth of 0.9 m below the present ground surface without revealing the lowest course.

- 5.1.4 The walling revealed in the trenches was of the same limestone rubble construction as the rest of the wall but the coursing was noticeably less even than that above the present ground surface in trenches 2 and 3, (Fig.7, Plate 4).

- 5.1.5 The foundation cut for the nave wall lay under the buried medieval soil (102, 202 and 302) and was truncated by the buttress construction cuts (111, 105, 207 and 308).

5.1.6 *Medieval Soil Horizon*

- 5.1.7 The first archaeological horizon was encountered upon removal of the subsoil deposits (101, 201 and 301) at 0.15 - 0.20m below the present ground surface.

- 5.1.8 The buried soil was present in all three trenches (102, 202 and 302) and comprised a dark brownish grey silty clay material with very infrequent small fragments of limestone and ceramic building material.

- 5.1.9 The soil horizon was on average 0.2 m thick and was cut by grave cuts (108, 212) and foundation cuts (105, 207 and 308) for wall buttresses (400, 401 and 403) respectively. This soil horizon sealed the foundation cut (103 and 108) for the north wall of the church.

- 5.1.10 Sherds of late Saxon to medieval pottery were recovered from this material dating from the mid 11th to 14th centuries.

5.1.11 *Graves*

- 5.1.12 Three graves (108, 212 and 306) were identified lying between the buttresses close to the north wall of the church. In addition, a grave was uncovered in the northward extension of Trench 1 and can be identified by the headstone as that of Walter Young (d.1936) and Elizabeth Young (d.1942).

- 5.1.13 Grave (108) was the only one excavated to the level where an interment was revealed 1 m below the present ground surface. Grave (212) was excavated to the same level without uncovering an interment and the grave in Trench 3 was identified at the level of the medieval horizon (302) but not excavated. The grave of Ernest and Beatrice Young was likewise left undisturbed.

- 5.1.14 Grave (108) was 1.6 m in length on a west to east axis, 0.7 m wide and 0.6 m deep cut from the top of buried soil (102). The upper part of the grave had been truncated at its eastern end by the foundation cut (105) for buttress (401), (Fig. 4, Plate 1).
- 5.1.15 Grave (108) was infilled by a mottled dark brown and yellowish green clay material (110) that sealed the skeleton (109). Sherds of pottery dating from the mid 11th to 14th centuries were recovered from this material.
- 5.1.16 The inhumation (109) within grave (108) was in an extended supine position orientated west to east. There was no indication of the presence of coffin nails or staining attributable to the presence of a coffin. There was a degree of staining immediately adjacent to the bones which could represent soft tissue or the presence of a winding sheet/shroud. The skeleton's feet had been truncated by the foundation cut (105) for buttress (401) (Plate 1).
- 5.1.17 Grave (212) was 1.4 m long on a roughly west to east orientation, 0.5 m wide and 0.6 m deep cut from the top of buried soil (202). The cut had been truncated at its eastern end by the foundation cut (207) for buttress (402).
- 5.1.18 Grave (212) was infilled by two materials (210 and 211). (210) was a very dark brownish black clayey silt 0.1 m thick overlying (211) a mid greyish yellow clay. No internment was uncovered at the vertical limit of excavation. The length of the grave suggests it was that of a child or sub adult. Sherds of pottery dating from the mid 11th to mid 13th centuries were recovered from (210).
- 5.1.19 A grave was identified in Trench 3 by deposit (306), a greyish yellow clay that intruded into the medieval soil horizon (302). This grave was 0.8 m long and 0.6 m wide within the trench and was orientated on a west-east axis. The full length of the grave was not uncovered as it ran under the west edge of Trench 3 and had been truncated at its eastern end by the foundation cut (207) for buttress (402).
- 5.1.20 **Buttresses**
- 5.1.21 The footings for 4 buttresses (400, 401, 402 and 403) were investigated. All four buttresses had foundation cuts (111, 105, 207 and 308) that truncated the medieval soil horizon (102, 202, 302).
- 5.1.22 Buttresses (400, 401 and 403) demonstrated a level of uniformity in construction below the present ground surface. These were constructed from large ashlar off-cuts with large limestone rubble and slab infilling set in rough courses within an orangey sandy mortar matrix, (Fig.5, Plate 2).
- 5.1.23 The footings for buttresses (401 and 403) were uncovered to a depth of 0.9 m below the present ground surface. The lowest coursing was still not visible at this depth. These footings had a slight splay, each course stepping out by approximately 0.05m. The base of buttress (403) had settled with a pronounced tilt downwards towards the north wall of the nave.
- 5.1.24 Buttress (402) differed from the others being constructed wholly from very large limestone ashlar blocks with a pronounced splay occupying the entire width its foundation trench (207). This footing was uncovered to a depth of 0.9 m below the present without revealing its lowest course. The lowest course visible included a massive block of limestone ashlar that had clearly been worked with two shallow rectangular indents visible in its ventral surface, (Fig.6, Plate 3).

- 5.1.25 None of the buttress footings had been keyed into the nave wall. The settling of buttress (403) had left a slight gap against the nave wall.
- 5.1.26 The foundation trenches for all the buttresses were clearly the last phase of medieval intrusion within all three trenches. Pottery sherds dating from the 10th to the 14th centuries were recovered from the fill (107) of foundation cut (105).

5.2 Finds

Medieval Pottery - Carole Wheeler

- 5.2.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 28 sherds with a total weight of 269 g. The assemblage ranged from late Saxon (10th/11th century) to medieval (11th/14th century) in date. Most of the sherds were too small to reflect the vessel form, however, three could be associated with jugs by their decoration, and the others are likely, from their fabric types and lack of decorative finish, to be cooking or storage jars.
- 5.2.2 The assemblage has been recorded utilising the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1994).

Human Osteology - Ceriwen Boston

- 5.2.3 A single burial (109) was investigated in Trench 1. The burial was positioned between buttresses (400 and 401). The burial comprised a single extended supine skeleton orientated west to east in a traditional Christian manner. The legs were fairly close together and the arms bilaterally to the sides, so close that the forearm bones lay under the pelvis. The hands rested alongside the femoral shafts. The feet and distal tibia and fibuli were truncated by the placement of buttress (401) and its associated foundation cut.
- 5.2.4 It was impossible to be specific about the age of the skeleton due to the poor preservation of the bones. The long bones appeared to be fused, this and the length of the skeleton indicate that the skeleton was an adult.
- 5.2.5 The skeleton exhibited a rounded mandibular angle, shallow anterior symphysis, gracile post-cranial skeleton and a flared pelvis, all indicative of the skeleton being that of a female. The rest of the sexable features were not observable or had been destroyed.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The three trial pits clearly demonstrated a sequence of medieval activity against the north wall of the nave. This was followed by a period of little disturbance until the excavation of the post-medieval graves and the installation of modern drainage.

6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 A sequence of medieval activity can be demonstrated from the three trial pits.
- 6.2.2 The earliest phase was the construction of the north wall of the nave which is thought to have occurred sometime in the 12th century. This was followed by a steady build up of material within the graveyard (102, 202 and 302). Pottery sherds dating from the 10th to 14th centuries were recovered from this material. Three graves (108, 212) and that represented by (306) were then inserted through the soil accumulation. Pottery sherds dating from the 10th to 14th

centuries were recovered from graves 108 and 212. Finally the four buttresses (400, 401, 402 and 403) were added against the nave wall. Pottery sherds dating from the 10th to 14th centuries were recovered from the foundation of Buttress (401).

- 6.2.3 The wide date range of the pottery recovered suggests a long history of activity on the site. Of particular interest is the prevalence of early pottery types from the 10th and 11th centuries that predate the supposed construction of the nave. The pottery can only be used to give a rough dating of the sequence of activity as the excavation of the three graves and the buttress foundation cuts has probably resulted in the migration of sherds within the sequence.
- 6.2.4 A suggested chronology, based on the assumption that the nave wall was constructed in the 12th century, is that the graves were inserted between this date and the mid 13th century and that the buttresses were constructed in the 14th century.
- 6.2.5 The different construction technique used in the footing for buttress (402) compared to (400, 401 and 403) suggest that this buttress was not constructed at the same time as the others. The use of very large ashlar for this buttress, one stone of which had clearly been worked, could indicate that it was constructed when such pieces were available on the site. It seems likely that this could only have been during the construction of the west tower in the 15th century.
- 6.2.6 The presence of early pottery fabric types within the pits, including St Neots ware and early medieval west Oxfordshire, indicates that there was activity on the site prior to the construction of the nave wall in the 12th century. It is possible that the presence of these fabric types indicate that a church was present on the site at the latest by the late Saxon period. A second possibility is that these sherds have migrated from a nearby settlement.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Trench 1						
100	Layer	-	0.0 m - 0.10 m	Topsoil	-	Modern
101	Layer	-	0.1 m - 0.25 m	Made Ground	-	Modern
102	Layer	-	-	Buried Soil	-	Medieval
103	Cut	0.30 m	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
104	Fill	0.30 m	-	Fill of 103	-	Medieval
105	Cut	0.25 m	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
106	Layer	-	-	Buried Soil	-	Medieval
107	Fill	-	-	Fill of 105	Pottery	Medieval
108	Cut	-	-	Grave	-	Medieval
109	Burial	-	-	Skeleton	-	Medieval
110	Fill	-	-	Fill of 108	Pottery	Medieval
111	Cut	-	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
400	Structure	-	-	Buttress	-	Medieval
401	Structure	-	-	Buttress	-	Medieval
500	Structure	-	-	N.Wall	-	Medieval
Trench 2						
200	Layer	-	0.0 m - 0.17 m	Topsoil	-	Modern
201	Layer	-	0.17 m - 0.30 m	Subsoil	-	Modern
202	Layer	-	0.30 m	Buried Soil	Pottery	Medieval
203	Fill	-	-	Fill of 207	-	Medieval
204	Fill	-	-	Fill of 212	Pottery	Medieval
205	Layer	-	0.30 m	Same as 202	-	Medieval
206	Structure	-	-	Buttress	-	Medieval
207	Cut	-	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
208	Cut	-	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
209	Fill	-	-	Fill of 208	-	Medieval
210	Fill	-	-	Fill of 212	Pottery	Medieval
211	Fill	-	-	Fill of 212	-	Medieval
212	Cut	-	-	Grave	-	Medieval
402	Structure	-	-	Buttress	-	Medieval
501	Structure	-	-	N.Wall	-	Medieval
Trench 3						
300	Layer	-	0.0 m - 0.19 m	Topsoil	-	Modern
301	Layer	-	0.10 m - 0.32 m	Subsoil	-	Modern
302	Layer	-	0.32 m	Buried Soil	Pottery	Medieval
303	Fill	-	-	Fill of 304	-	Medieval
304	Cut	-	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
305	Structure	-	-	Buttress	-	Medieval
306	Fill	-	-	Grave ?	-	Medieval
307	Structure	-	-	Wall Footing	-	Medieval
308	Cut	-	-	Foundation	-	Medieval
403	Structure	-	-	Buttress	-	Medieval
503	Structure	-	-	N.Wall	-	Medieval

APPENDIX 2 POTTERY ANALYSIS BY CONTEXT

CONTEXT	FABRIC	COMMON NAME	CHRONOLOGY	FORM
107	OXR-type	St Neot's type	10 th -mid11thC in Oxford region	jug
	OXY-type	Medieval Oxford ware	mid 11 th -mid 13thC	
	OXAM	Brill/Boarstall ware	13 th -14thC	
	1 limestone & flint tempered sherd unknown			
210	OXY	Medieval Oxford ware	mid-11 th -mid13thC	
	1 gravel-tempered sherd unknown			
302	OXB-type	shelly ware	?to mid-11thC in Oxford	
	OXAC-type		10 th – mid 13thC	
204	OXY	Medieval Oxford ware	mid 11 th -mid 13thC	
202	OXY	Medieval Oxford ware	mid 11 th – mid 13thC	
	OXR	St Neot's ware	10 th – mid 11 th in Oxford region	
	OX68	Potterspury type	13 th -14thC	
	OXAC	Early medieval west Oxfordshire ware	10 th – mid 13thC	
110	OXAW	Brill/Boarstall ware	13 th -14thC	jug
	OXY	Medieval oxford ware	mid 11 th -mid 13thC	
	OXR-type	St Neot's type ware	10 th – mid-11thC in Oxford	
	OXAC	Early medieval west Oxfordshire ware	10 th – mid 13thC	
	1 oxidised sherd unknown			

APPENDIX 3

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APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Leonard's Church, Grendon Underwood, Buckinghamshire

Site code: GRULC 03

Grid reference: SP 6772 2099

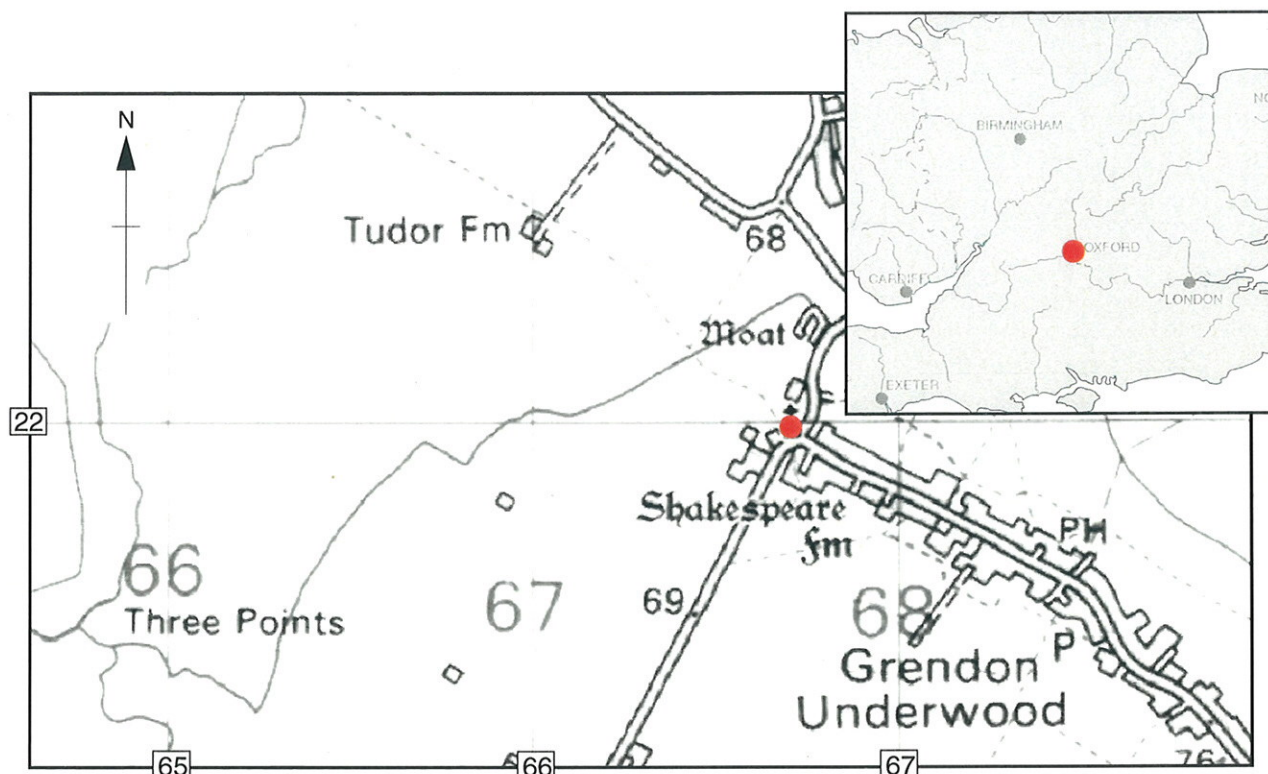
Type of evaluation: 3 Machine excavated Test Pits

Date and duration of project: 10/11/2003 - 14/11/2003

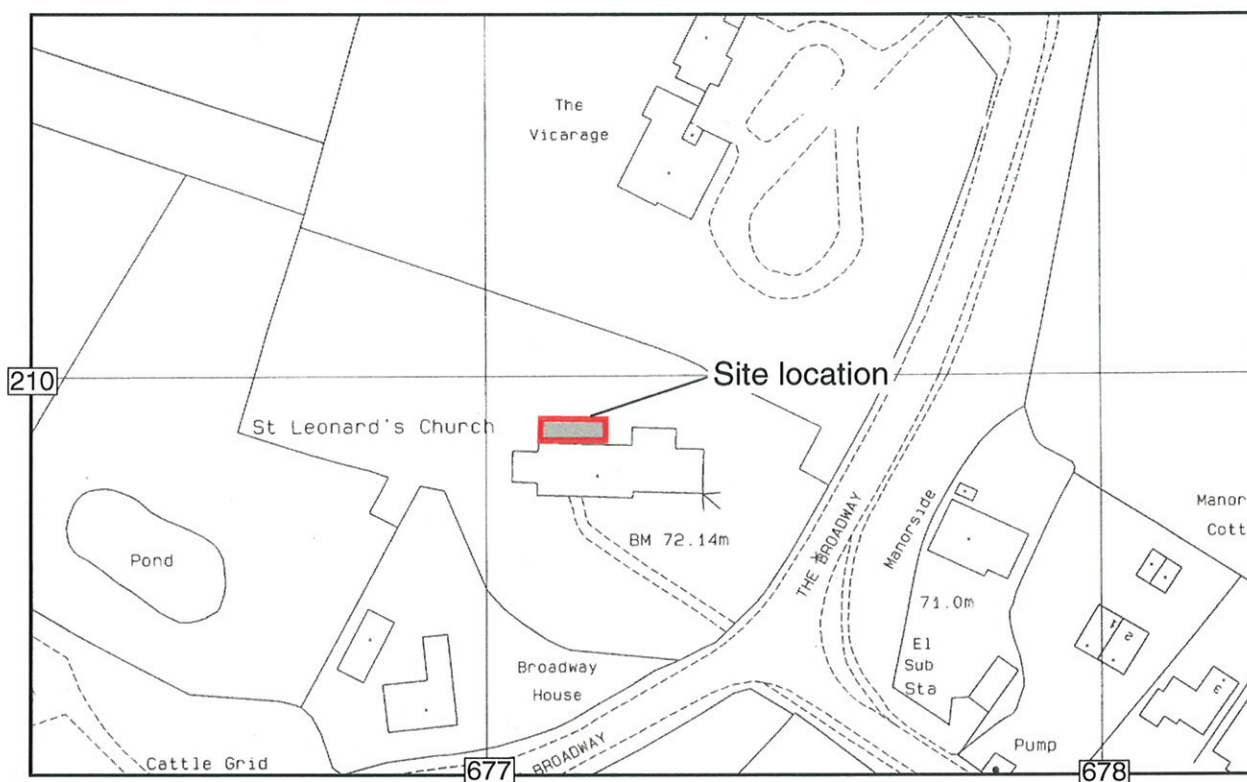
Area of site: 15m²

Summary of results: A sequence of medieval activity, comprising the insertion of graves and construction of buttresses. Pottery indicates that there was activity on the site, possibly an earlier church, dating back at least to the late Saxon period.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with



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Figure 1: Site location

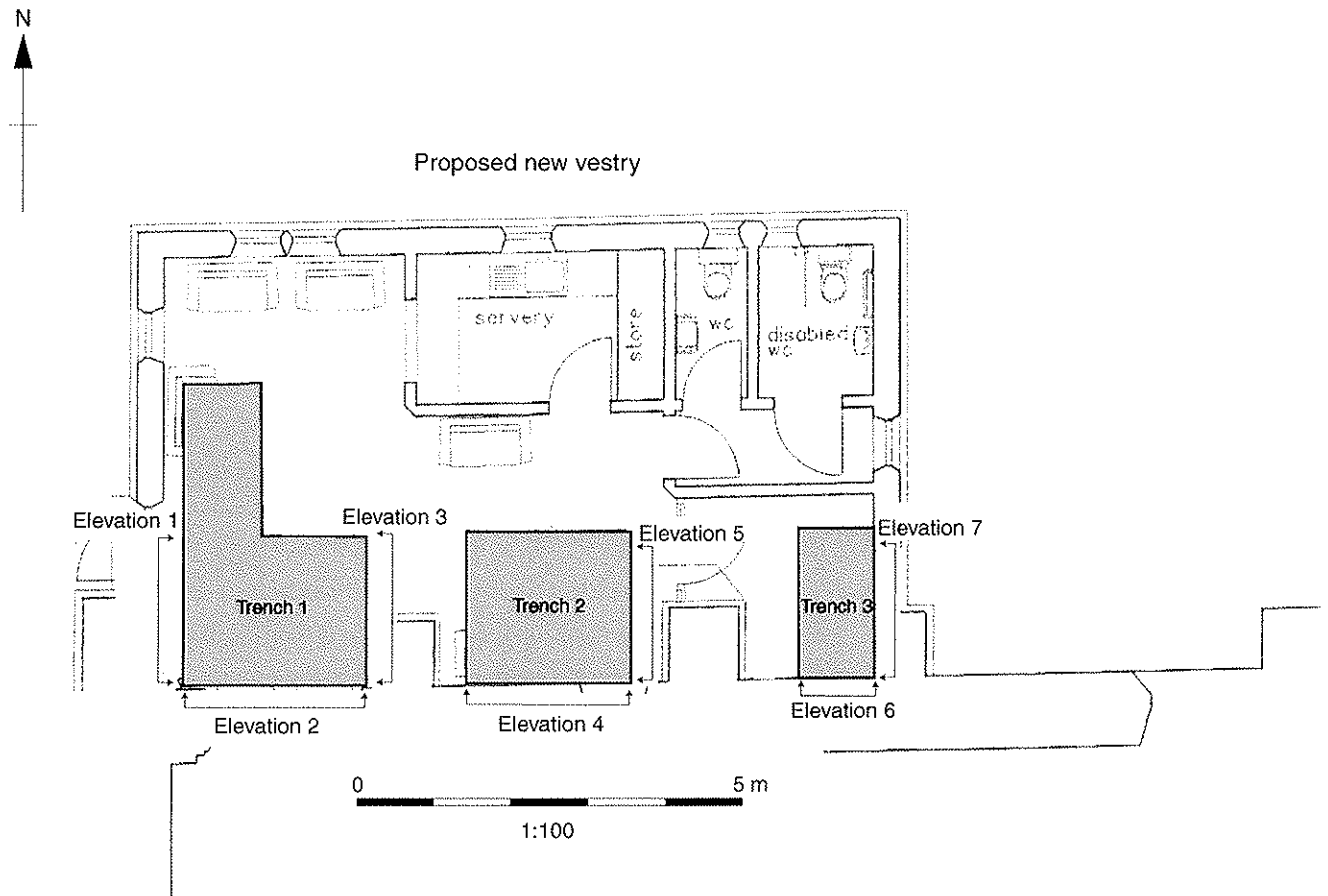
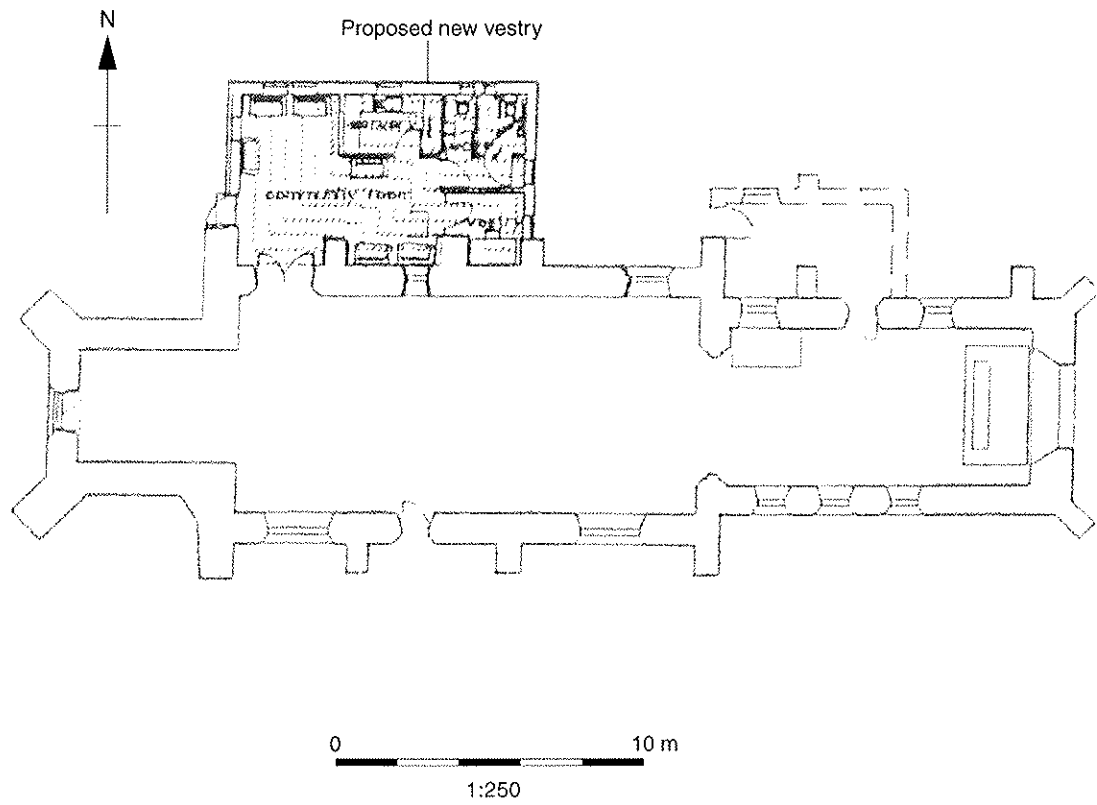


Figure 2: Trench location plan

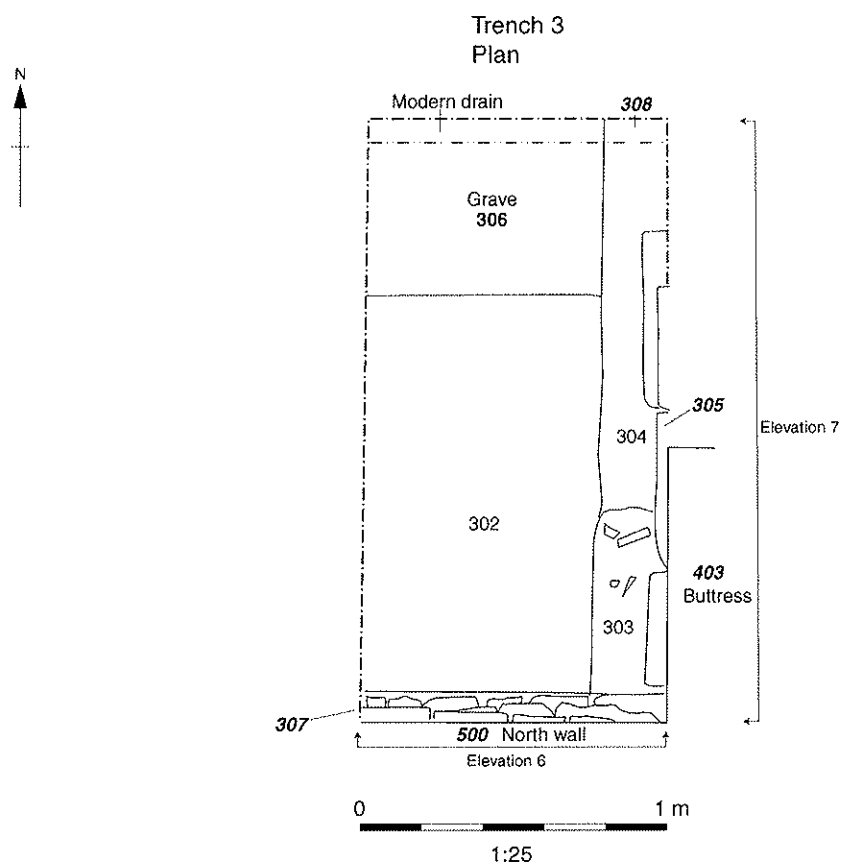
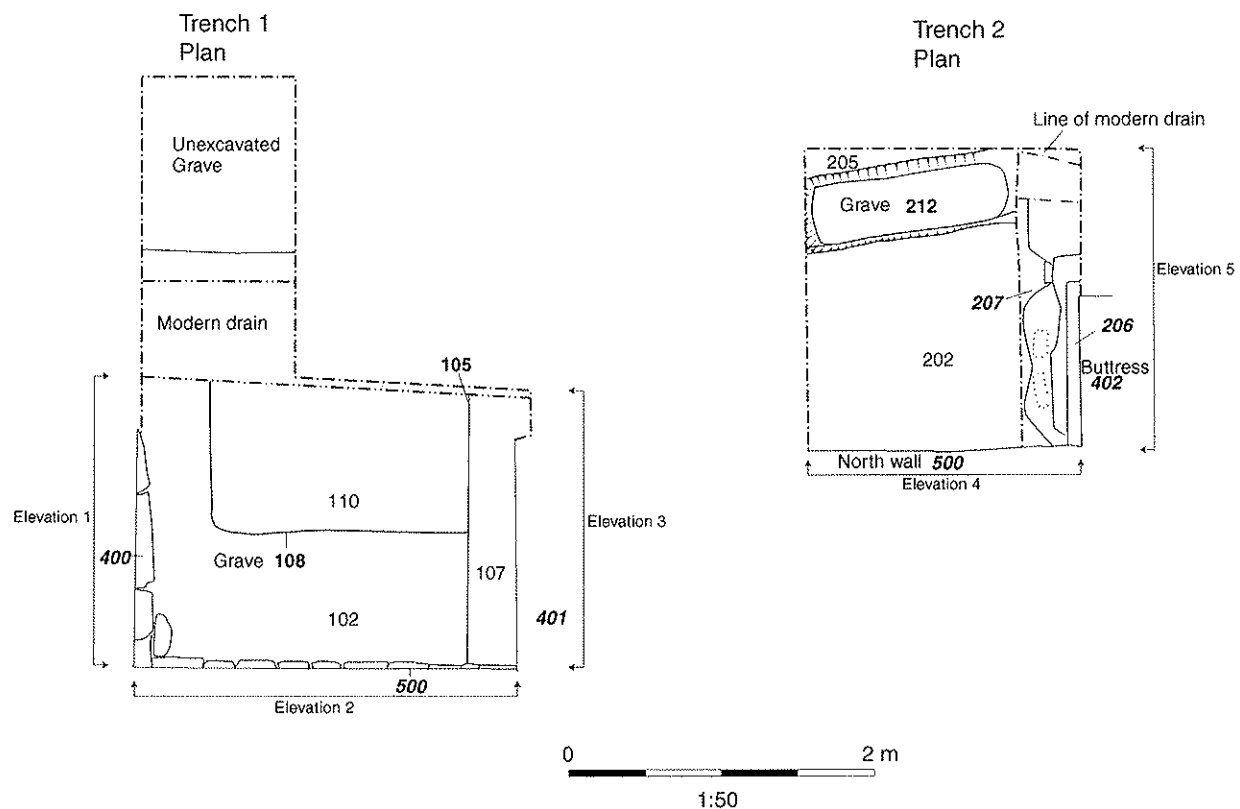


Figure 3: Plans of Trenches 1, 2 and 3

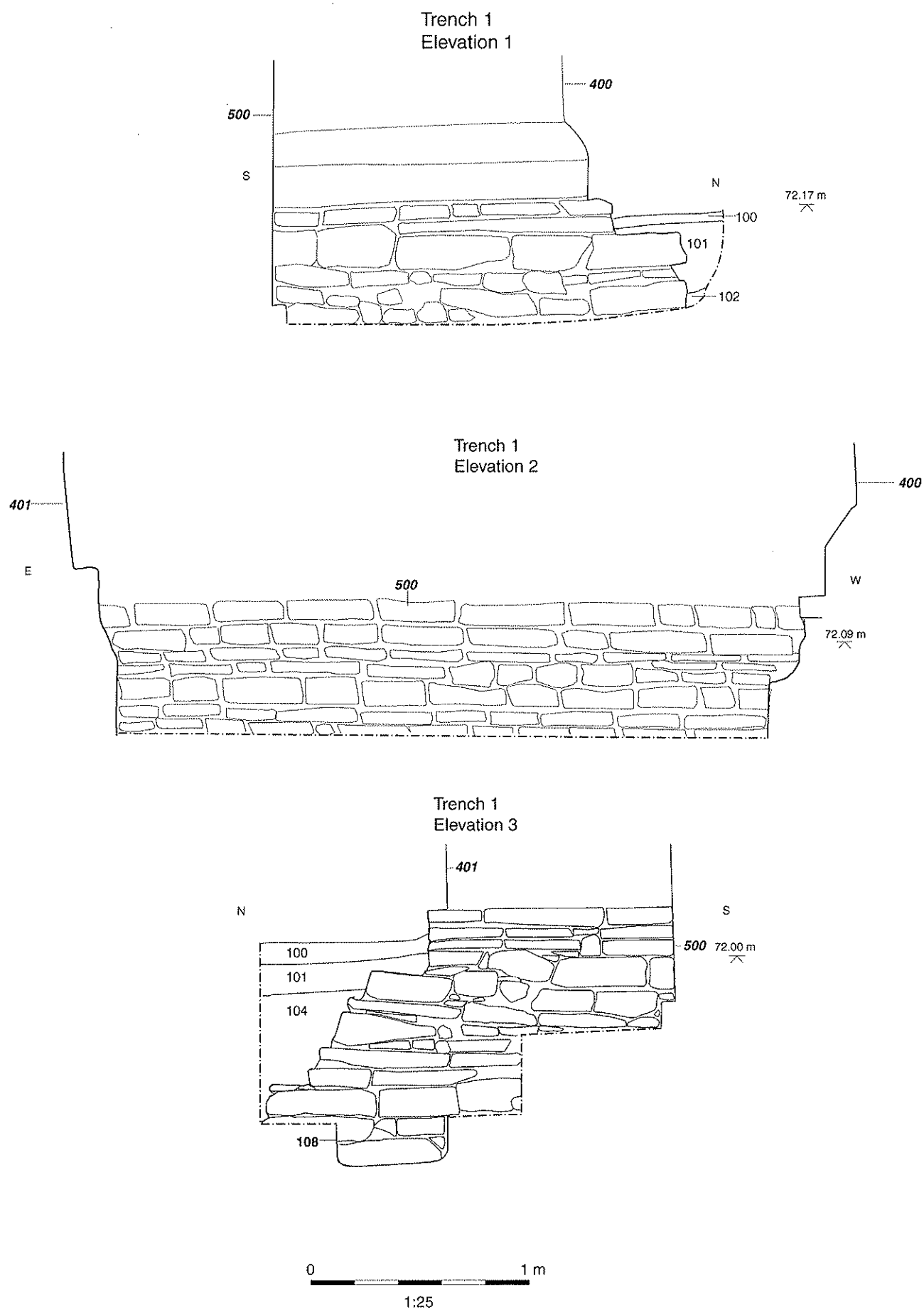


Figure 5: Trench 1 elevations

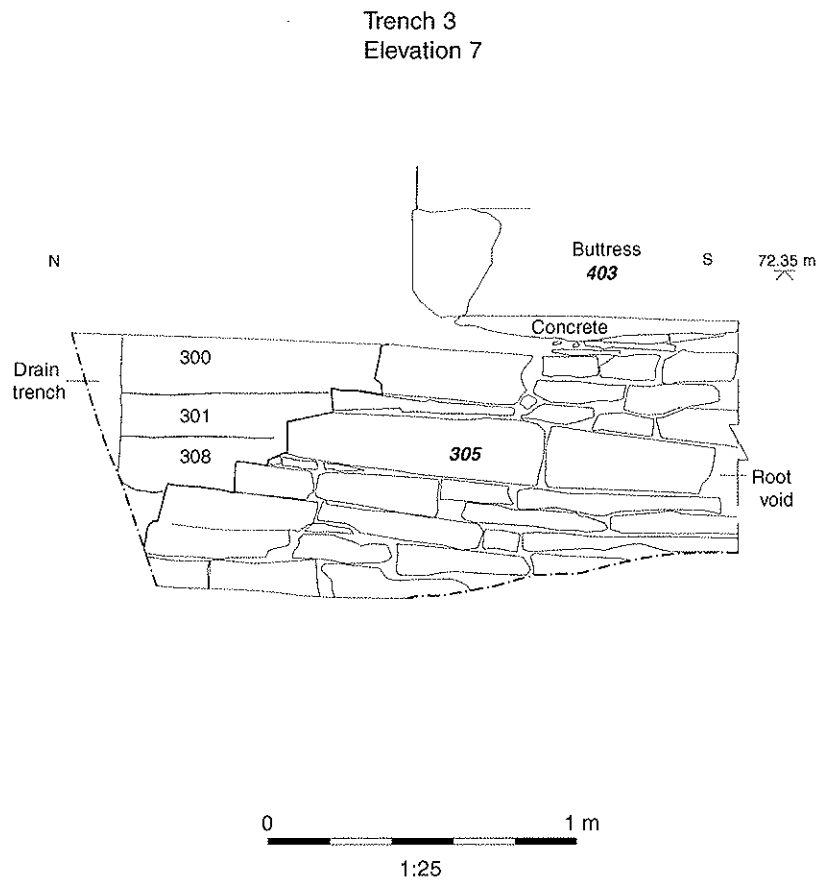
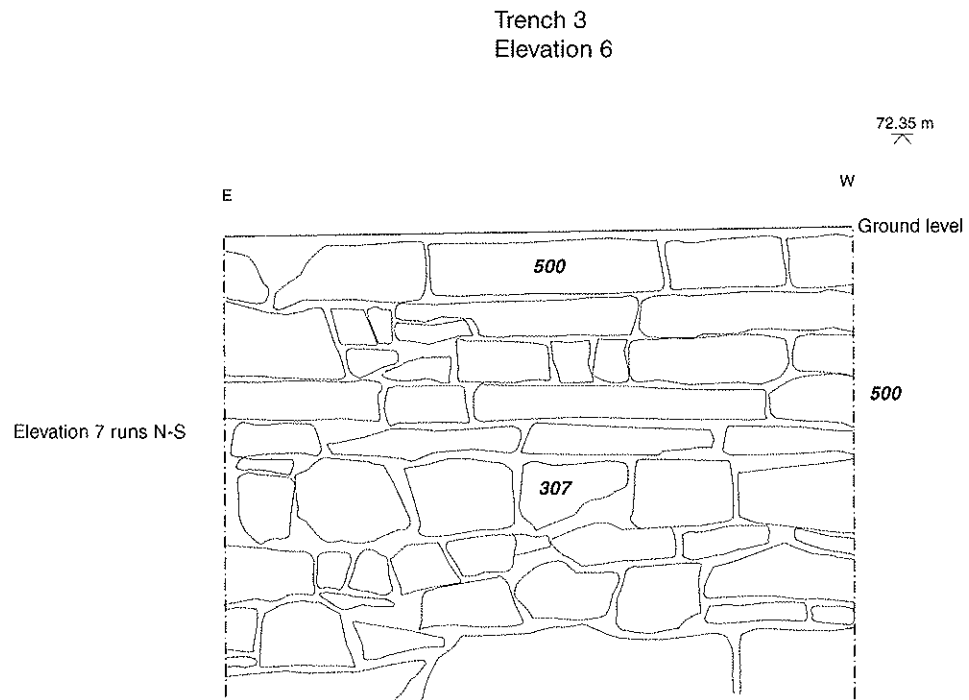


Figure 7: Trench 3 elevations



Plate 1: Skeleton 109



Plate 2: Buttress foundation 401



Plate 3: Buttress foundation 402



Plate 4: North wall of nave, showing location of proposed doorway