

St Peter's Church Stoke Lyne Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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St Peter's Church, Stoke Lyne, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between 30th July and 23rd of August 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Stoke Lyne, Oxfordshire (NGR:566 283). The work was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council in advance of the installation of new drains and a soakaway pit. The watching brief revealed deposits of present day and earlier churchyard soils overlying natural deposits. No significant archaeology or articulated inhumations were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between 30th July and 23rd August 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Stoke Lyne, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 566 283). The work was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council in advance of the installation of new drains and an associated soakaway pit.

1.1.2 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the project brief prepared by Julian Munby and the Church Commissioners, setting out the standards and requirements for the conduction of a watching brief.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The village of Stoke Lyne is situated 5 km north of the town of Bicester (Fig.1). The church is centrally located within the village and occupies an area c0.3 hectares of level ground at a height of 112 m above OD. The site is bounded to the west and north by dwellings and to the south and east by public highways. The underlying geology is alluvium over White Limestone Formations (British Geological Survey, Sheet no 219).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the watching brief was prepared for the project using published sources (Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire, Volume VI, p312-323) and is summarised below.

1.3.2 The original settlement of Stoke Lyne was centrally placed in the valley of the Bure stream. The name of Stoke was derived from the Old English *stoc* meaning "cattle farm". It was once called Stoke Insula or Stoke de Lisle after the medieval lords of the manor, but after it passed into the hands of the Lynde family in the 15th-century the suffix Lyne came into use. It has been suggested that by the 14th-century Stoke had become a sizable village, though by the 17th century it had contracted in size, and the traces of disused and decayed buildings gave rise to the erroneous belief that the village had once been a market town. By the mid-18th century some 40 houses were recorded within the village. A 1797 map showed that most of the village of Stoke

Lyne lay north of the church, although a disastrous fire in 1851 destroyed about 25 thatched cottages, resulting in them being rebuilt outside the village.

- 1.3.3 The earliest reference to Stoke church occurs in the mid 12th-century, when it was granted to Notley Abbey in Buckinghamshire, by Walter Giffard, the overlord of the manor, and his wife. The church remained under the control of the abbey until 1542 when it formed part of extensive grants of monastic lands made to Christ Church, the cathedral church of the new see of Oxford.
- 1.3.4 The church itself comprises a chancel, nave and north and south transepts, with a tower over the south transept. The nave and chancel were built in the 12th century, and both the chancel arch and the fine south doorway are Romanesque work of the period. Over the doorway there is a niche containing a contemporary statue of a seated figure, probably St Peter.
- 1.3.5 The south transept was added early in the 14th century and forms the lower stage of the tower. This is lighted by a three-light window with a reticulated tracery, and has an embattled parapet and a pyramidal roof. Its repair or alteration in 1658 is recorded by an inscription on the exterior.
- 1.3.6 The church once had a northern aisle, but it had been mostly demolished by the early 19th century with the exception of the eastern bay, which was reconstructed to form a quasi-transept. The blocked up arches of the arcade can still be seen in the north wall of the nave.
- 1.3.7 Repairs in 1757 included repointing the tower, plastering the roof, and walling up one of the doors. By the mid-19th century the church was in a dilapidated condition, the chancel walls and roof were in need of repair, the floors were uneven and the walls green with damp. In 1868/9 the church was restored when chancel was rebuilt on the old foundations and copies of the original three Romanesque windows were installed in the eastern end, but the circular window above them was a new feature. The walls of the nave were also repaired and a new west window built. As part of the restorations the tower was raised and buttressed and the battlements were added, the porch was rebuilt, a vestry added and the church seating renewed. The chancel was restored again in 1951 when the Victorian reredos was removed, and a new altar and altar rail of unstained oak installed.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of any ground works.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The majority of the trenching was excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.5 m wide toothless bucket, with hand digging used to supplement this adjacent to the church walls. The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during the period of ground works.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent and location of any excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 and where recorded any sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).
- 2.2.3 Included in the Archaeological Recording Specification were details listing the procedure when encountering human remains. These stated “ Where early modern or medieval human remains are disturbed in the course of the work they should be treated with due care and regard to the sensitivities involved. The location of any charnel (unarticulated bone) should be recorded and reserved for reburial, if immediate re-internment is not possible. Burials of archaeological significance should also be left *in-situ* until examined by an appropriately qualified osteoarchaeologist, and only to be removed by the archaeologist if impacts are substantial. No human remains may be removed [from site] without the express permission of the Consistory Court”
- 2.2.4 During the course of the trenching operations only unarticulated human remains (charnel) were encountered, and these were reburied as close as possible to their original location during the backfilling the trench.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 At the base of the deepest excavation (for the soakaway pit) the underlying natural, a tabular limestone in a yellow-brown clay matrix (5), was encountered at a depth of 1.2 m below ground level (Fig. 3, section 5). This was overlaid by a layer of dark orange-brown silt clay (4) which measured up to 0.6 m in depth (Fig. 3, sections 1 to 5). This deposit contained numerous angular fragments of limestone and represents a layer of weathered natural. This layer was encountered throughout the length of the excavation.
- 3.1.2 Overlying this was a layer of orange-brown clay silt (3), measuring between 0.3 m and 0.4 m in depth. This layer contained small sub-angular fragments of limestone and represents a subsoil, probably an earlier churchyard soil. Two fragments of charnel (unarticulated bone) were recovered from this context and were reburied *in-situ*. Sealing this deposit was a layer of grey-brown silt loam (2), measuring between 0.3 m and 0.4 m in depth. This deposit also contained small sub-angular fragments of

limestone and represents the present day churchyard soil and turf. Several abraded fragments of charnel (unarticulated bone) were recovered from this deposit and were reburied *in-situ*.

- 3.1.3 On the south, east and west sides of the church layer 2 was overlaid by a 0.1 m deep layer of compacted pea gravel (1) (Fig. 3, sections 1 and 2), which formed a pathway encircling the church.

3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 No dating evidence or artefacts (including coffin fittings or shroud pins) were recovered during the course of the watching brief.

3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The watching brief showed evidence of two phases of activity within the churchyard as evidenced by the two layers of churchyard soil, 2 and 3. No evidence was encountered for any of the earlier phases of church construction and no articulated inhumations were encountered.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.1 m	1.4 m	Pathway surface	-	C20th
2	Layer	0.3 m - 0.4 m	-	Present day churchyard soil	-	C19th/ C20th
3	Layer	0.3 m - 0.4 m	-	Subsoil, possible earlier churchyard soil	-	-
4	Layer	0.6 m	-	Weathered natural	-	-
5	Layer	> 0.5 m	-	Top of undisturbed natural	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

Julian Munby, 2007 *St Peter's Church, Stoke Lyne, Oxfordshire : Archaeological Recording Specification*

Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire Volume VI, p312-323

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Peter's Church, Stoke Lyne, Oxfordshire

Site code: STLSPC 07

Grid reference: SP 566 283

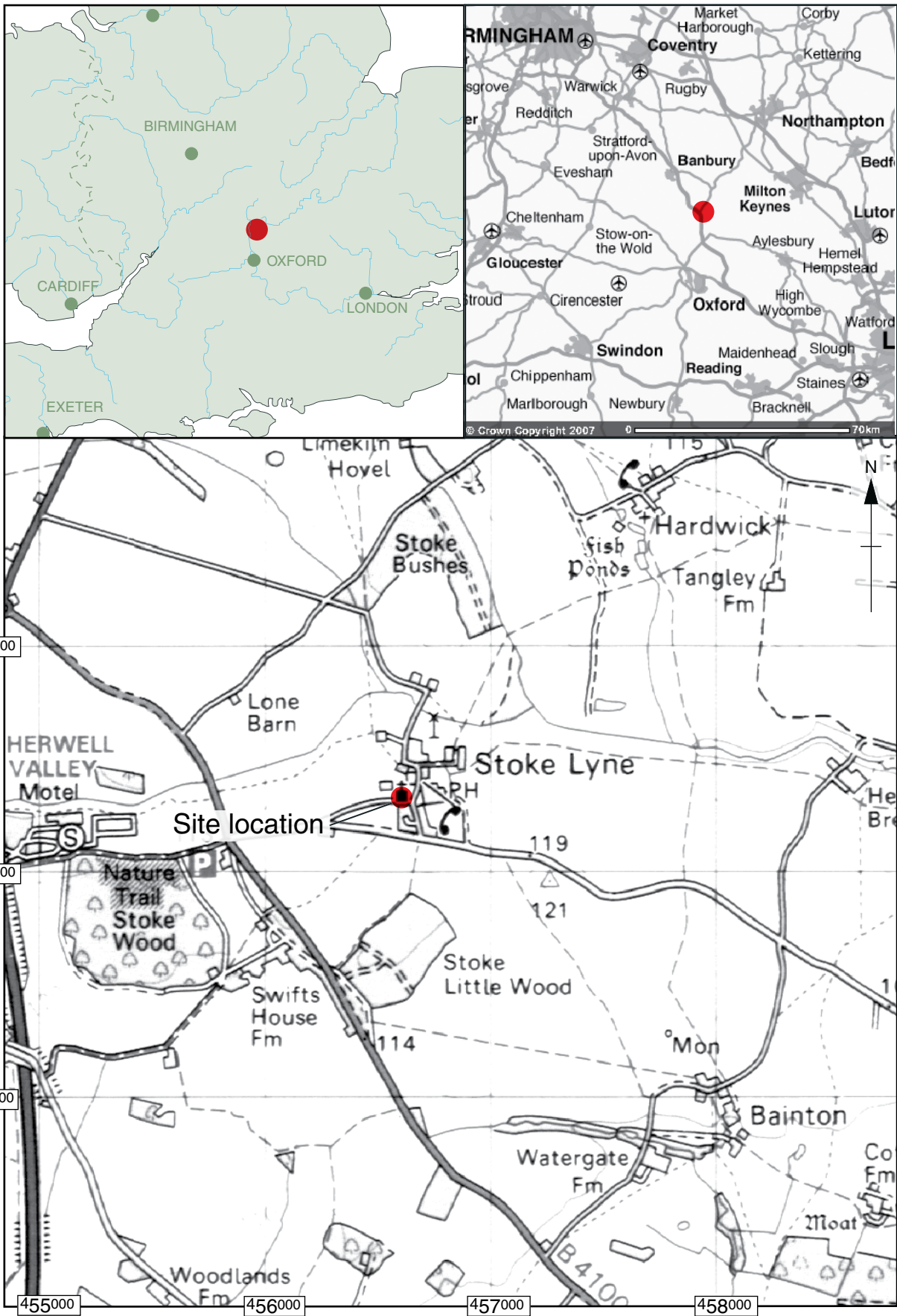
Type of watching brief: Machine and hand excavation of new service trenches

Date and duration of project: Between 30th July and 23rd August 2007, 8 site visits in total.

Area of site: c0.3 hectare

Summary of results: The watching brief exposed layers of churchyard soils over weathered natural limestone. No significant archaeology was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2007.89



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Figure 1: Site location

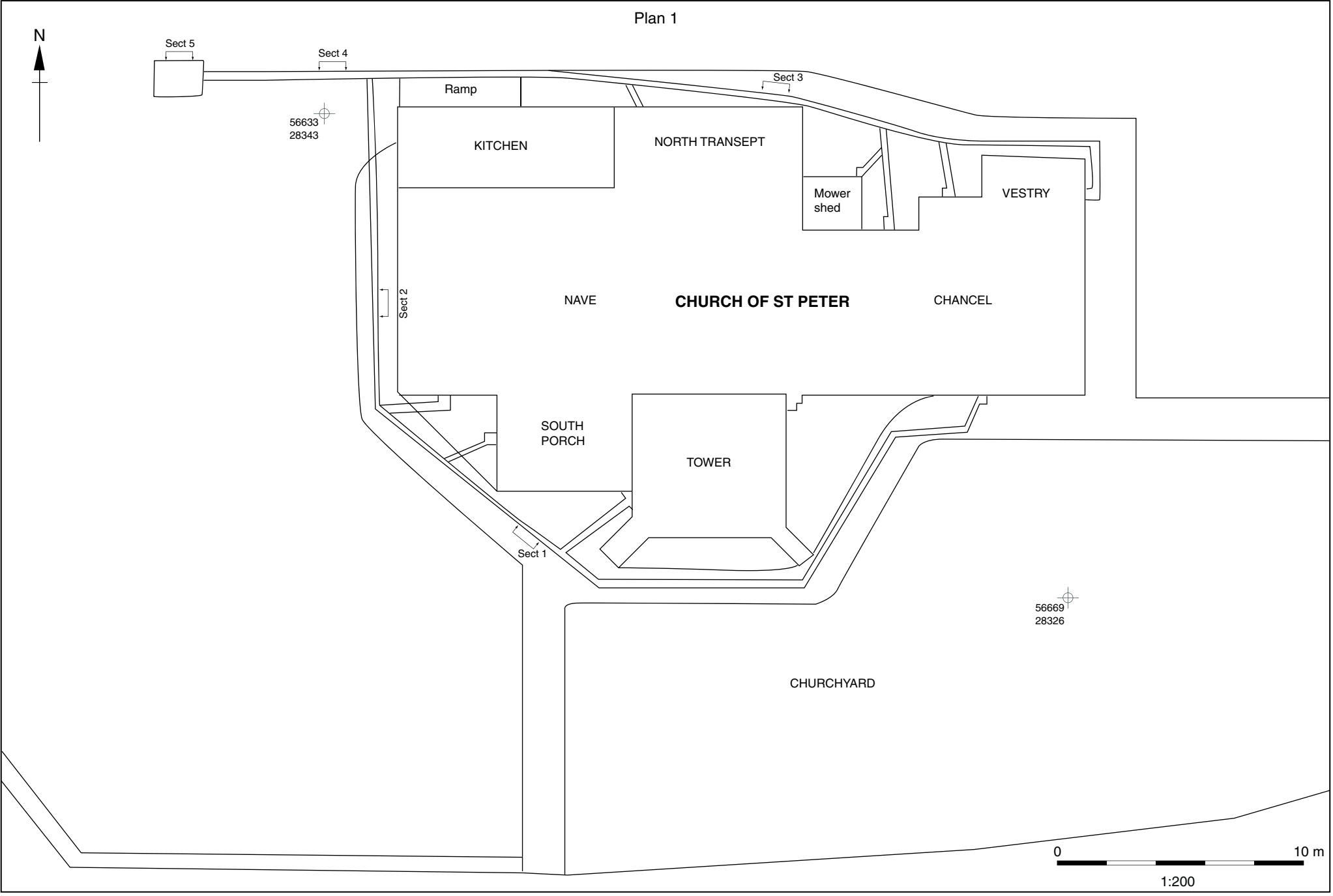


Figure 2 : Site plan showing extent of works

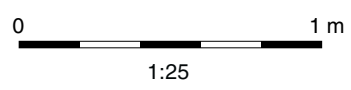
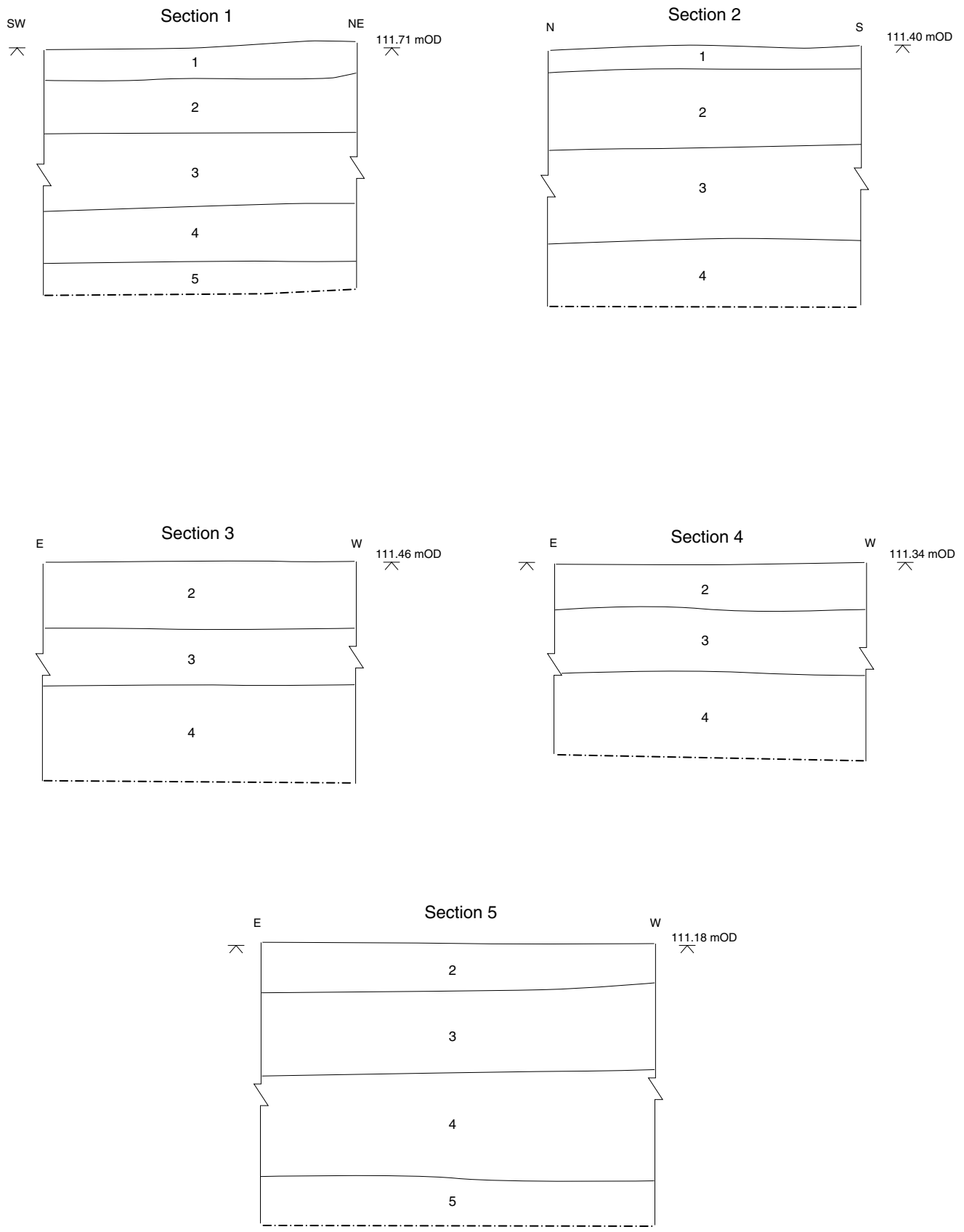


Figure 3 : Sections 1-5