

ST PETER'S CHURCH, STOKE LYNE

Introduction

A small evaluation trench was excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit outside the north wall of the nave of St Peter's church, Stoke Lyne (NGR SP 566-283). This revealed the existence of a robbed out wall that belonged to an external north aisle.

Character of development

There is a proposal to construct a kitchen and lobby on the site of the former north aisle of the church. Due to considerations of practicality the evaluation trench was located towards the NW end of the church and consisted of a N/S trench over 3 m long by 1.2 m wide (see Fig 1).

Timing

The excavation took place at the beginning of April 1992 and lasted two days including backfilling.

Archaeological and Architectural background

There has been no recorded archaeological work done on this site. The principal authorities on the fabric of the church are the V.C.H (1959) and Sherwood and Pevsner (1974). The church consists of a chancel and nave. A north aisle was apparently added in the early 13th century and the tower a century later (ibid). The north aisle no longer exists and the infilled arcades can still be seen within the present north wall of the church. According to the V.C.H Christopher Pettie is said to have been buried in the north aisle in the mid 17th century (1959, 322). It also mentions that two of the western most bays of the northern aisle were blocked up sometime by the early 19th century (ibid).

The Archaeology

Method

This involved a hand dug excavation to locate any surviving floor levels, inhumations and demolished north and west walls of the church.

The Excavation

The results of this investigation are best understood by consulting Fig 2 which shows a plan and section drawing of the trench. A description of the layers is given in the appendix of this report. The evaluation was concerned with three main questions, these will be addressed below.

Floor levels

The layer that could be interpreted as a 'surface' was that of context number 4 (Fig 2a). This consisted of a thin spread of pinkish mortar with flecks of charcoal about 20 mm thick. This appears to have been cut by the robber trench of the north aisle wall. This layer (4) does not extend very much to the west of the trench and is only tentatively interpreted as a possible floor surface.

Inhumations

There was no evidence for any burials in the western end of the proposed development. However, documentary evidence suggests that there was at least one internment of a distinguished individual in the mid-17th century (V.C.H 1959, 322). Given the restricted area of the excavation it would not be surprising if other inhumations were not also present.

Wall foundations

The principal discovery of the excavation was the location of the partially robbed out foundations of the former wall of the north aisle (8). This wall was originally about a metre wide and was situated approximately 3.25 m from the present day north wall. This measurement coincides almost precisely with that of the north wall of the Lady chapel. The foundation trench was excavated down to almost 1 m below the present day land surface onto flat laid slabs of Cornbrash stone. The foundation appears to continue further down to an unknown depth. The width of the foundation is only approximate since its northern edge appears to have been obscured by later grave cuts (6).

An attempt to locate the foundation trench of the west wall of the church was also made. However, although this went down to a depth of 0.6 m there was no evidence for the return of the wall. It is possible that the wall trench lies further down but it is conceivable that it may not have existed at this point. An alternative interpretation could be that the church may originally have been much larger. There is some surface evidence that suggests that the land appears to drop away 6.5 m to the east. This may or not be related to the whereabouts of an earlier west wall of the church. This question could only be answered by future work, possibly by remote sensing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The archaeological work undertaken by the O.A.U has been able to demonstrate the existence of a former wall belonging to the north aisle of the nave. Although there were no burials or positively identified floor surfaces it is not possible to rule their existence out. To judge from the plans presently available it

would seem that the new wall foundations would not adversely affect the buried archaeology. However, it is recommended that, at the very least, that the new foundation trenches are examined prior to the construction of the wall footings. This may yet throw further light on the architectural history of St Peter's church.

Appendix

This is a description of the layers that should accompany Fig 2.

1. Organic horizon.
2. Stone and gravelly/sandy mix with fragments of stone roofing slates. This is the make-up for a path.
3. A mix of soil and Cornbrash containing fragments of medieval and post-medieval sherds and glass.
4. A thin spread of compact pinkish mortar and flecks of charcoal.
5. A stony soil mix which becomes increasingly stony with depth.
6. A loose, crumbly, friable yellowish brown soil containing fragments of Cornbrash and human bone.
7. Mortary type layer with only a small amount of soil present.
8. Cut of robber trench for the foundation.
9. Stony clay loam.

O.A.U 27.4.92

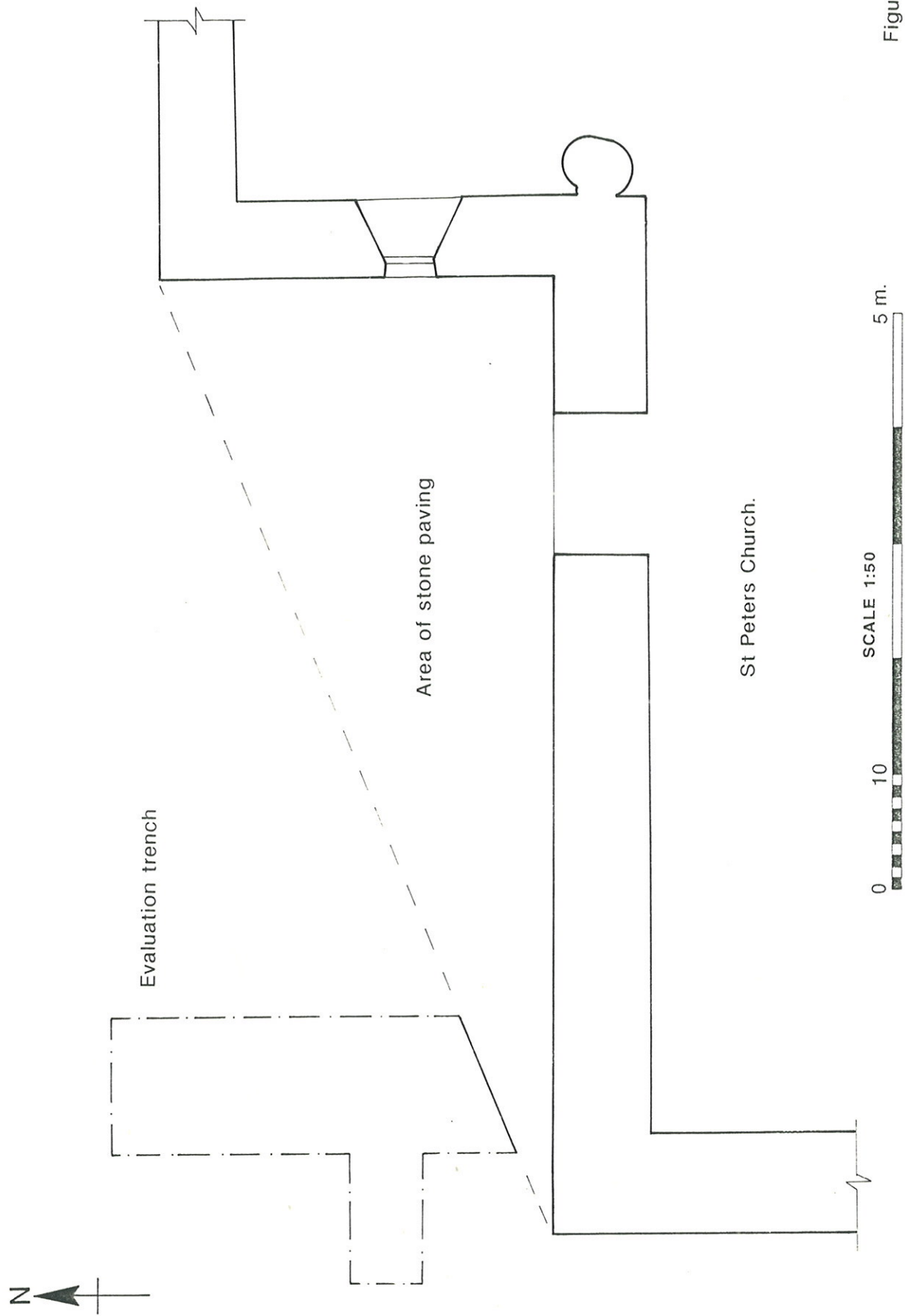


Figure 1

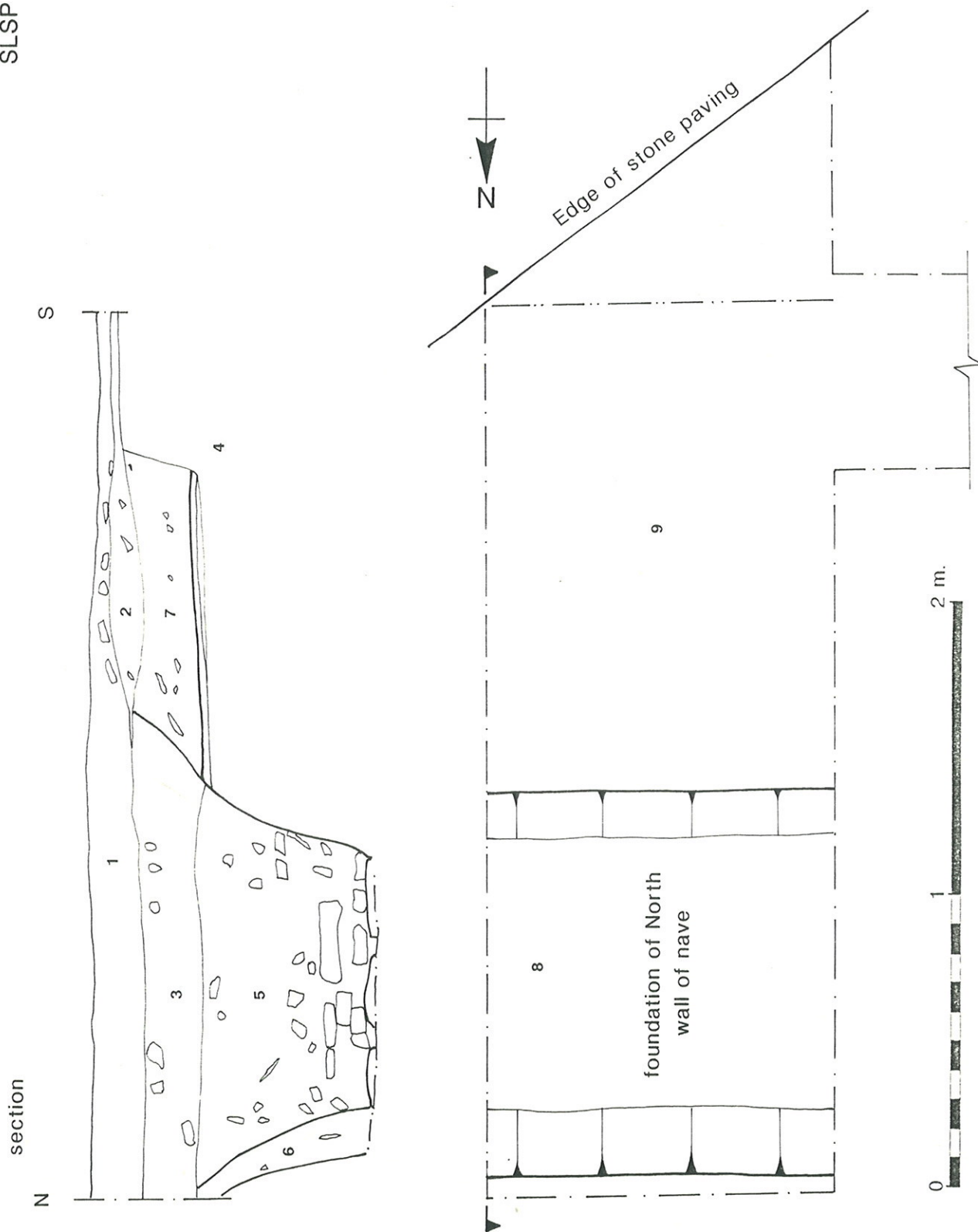


Figure 2