

NETTLEBED, ST BARTHOLOMEWS CHURCH, NSB 92

The Oxford Archaeological Unit conducted a watching brief at St Bartholomews Church, Nettledbed, Oxon (SU471187), between September 29 and October 13 1992, during building alterations.

The present church was built in 1845-6, superseding an earlier church, about which little is known other than it was probably of Norman foundation. Only the lower part of the tower remains of this church, the rest being overlaid by the present S Aisle. It was considered possible that the building work may shed some light on the internal structure of the earlier church. The building work was separated into four phases:

1. The removal and reconstruction of the tower floor.
2. The removal and reconstruction of the S Aisle floor under the stalls.
3. The removal and reconstruction of the vestry floor.
4. The installation of drainage from the W side of the tower to the main road.

RESULTS**1. THE TOWER (Plan 1, 2, Section 1, 2)**

The present brick floor of the tower was removed, and the level was lowered by 0.50 m, to a point 0.35 m below the present S Aisle floor. Visible in the W wall was the modern brickwork of the present tower overlaying the flintwork of its predecessor. The removed material was a make-up layer of loose mortar, stone and tile fragments (4), containing redeposited human and animal bone fragments, coffin fittings, decorative dome-headed nails, and a few fragments of inlaid floor tile. This overlay brick sleeper walls (5) and (6), set against the N and S sides of the tower. (5) and (6) overlay, against the W wall, a line of large dark red floor tiles, (7), up to 0.25 m x 0.20 m in size. On the E side of the tower, and at a similar level to (7), was the partly disturbed remains of a herringbone-patterned brick and tile floor (8). One of the tiles (size 0.12 m x 0.12 m), appeared to have an inlaid decoration depicting a leaping hare.

The bedding layer (9), for this floor, consisting of crushed mortar and light gravel, was still in place over the whole area. Investigation of this layer, in the centre of the tower area, revealed it to be approximately 0.02 m deep, overlying a layer of dark earth with gravel inclusions.

2. THE SOUTH AISLE (Plan 1, 3, Section 3)

The raised wooden floor under the stalls was removed and approximately 0.50 m of make-up was cleared, partially revealing two 19th century brick vaults (11) and (15), and a brick-lined cist (12). The make-up layer (2), was similar to (4) in composition, and also contained redeposited bone fragments.

Partially revealed in the W section of the excavated area was a worked stone grave slab (16), cut, 'in situ', by the barrel of vault (15). The construction, early this century, of a sub-floor heating duct along the N side of the Aisle has led to the cavity (22), being filled with rubble and a supporting brick wall (23) being inserted under (16).

Also in the W section, and at a level which is similar to that of (8), were noted partially disturbed remains of a brick and tile floor (17), overlying a mortar and gravel make-up layer (19), similar to (9).

3. THE VESTRY (Plan 1)

The floor of the vestry was removed, and a loose mortar, stone and gravel make-up layer was cleared to a depth of 0.32 m, revealing a trampled mortar surface.

4. THE CHURCHYARD (Plan 1, Section 4)

A 0.60 m wide trench was dug from the W side of the tower, parallel with the W boundary of the churchyard, to the main road drains; a distance, within the churchyard, of approximately 25 m. The depth of the trench increased from 0.50 m at its S end to 1.40 m at the point where it was cut under the churchyard wall.

Ten grave cuts were identified in section, all apparently oriented E-W. Three graves were sealed by the topsoil (24), seven were sealed by an earlier mixed layer of redeposited natural orangey clay with inclusions of flint chippings, and an earlier loamy topsoil with inclusions of tile and stone fragments (24). All but one of the graves was located in the N half of the trench.

A modern pipe trench (27), and a brick culvert (26), were also identified.

INTERPRETATION

The uncovered internal face of the tower revealed that only approximately 0.30 m of the original flintwork structure remains. The remnants of flooring (7), (8), and (17) are probably 17th century, although the small tiles could well be re-used from an earlier floor. The tile with the 'hare' device is typical of the product of the Penn tileries in Buckinghamshire, where production was at its peak in the second half of the 14th century.

In the S Aisle, the level of the grave slab (16) and the brick-lined cist, (which would have been surmounted by a slab), suggest a later floor, possibly of the 18th century. The construction of the vaults (11) and (15), and the new church itself, entailed the removal of that floor and the levelling up of the whole area by means of the dumped demolition layer (2) and (4).

The vestry revealed only a trampled construction surface beneath the make-up layer (2).

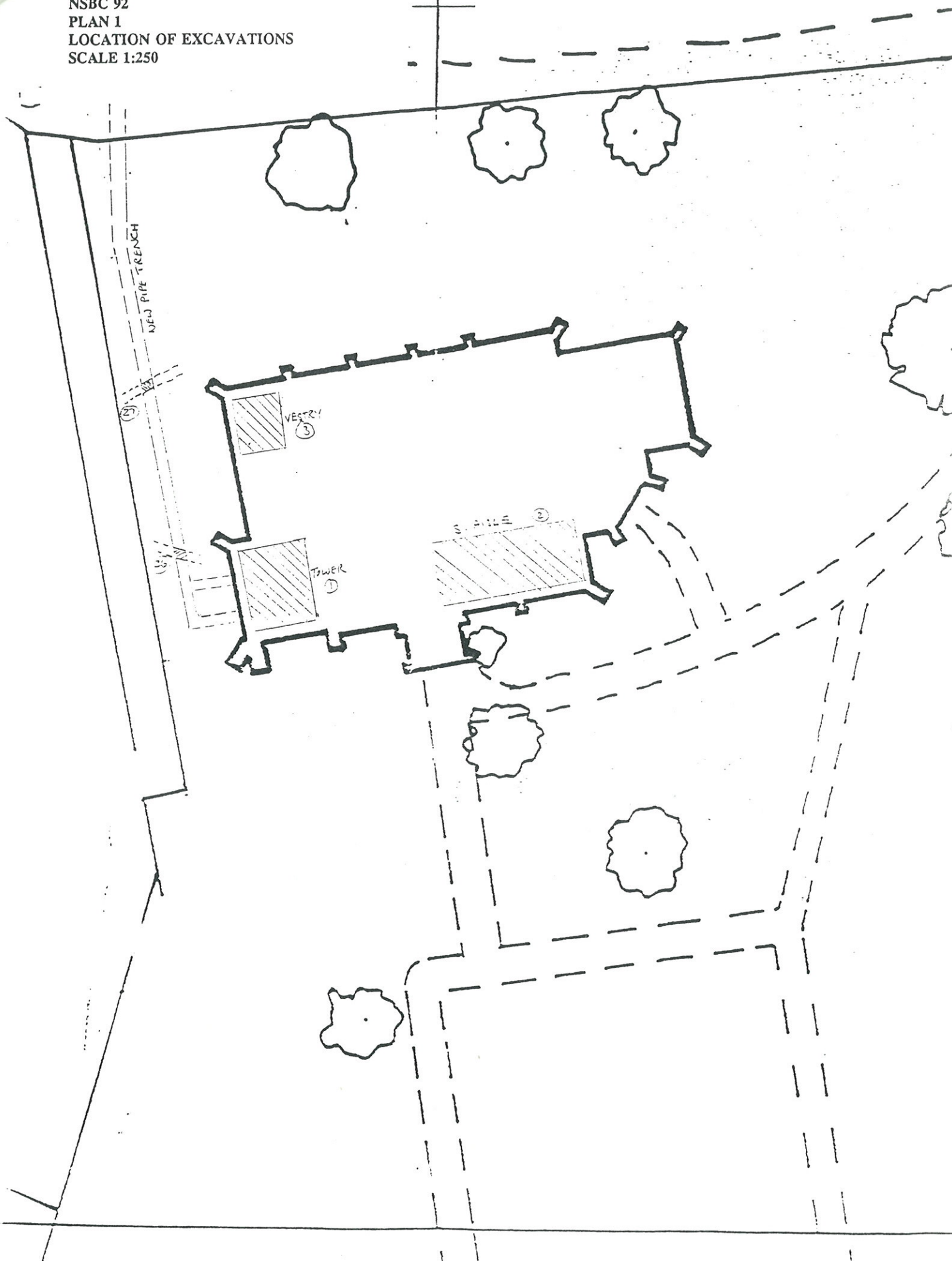
The level of the N part of the churchyard has been raised considerably by the dumping of excavated material (25), during the 1845-6 construction, but the distribution of the identified

grave cuts suggest that burials before 1845 were concentrated well to the N of the church, as they have been since.

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OAU
November 1992

HIGH

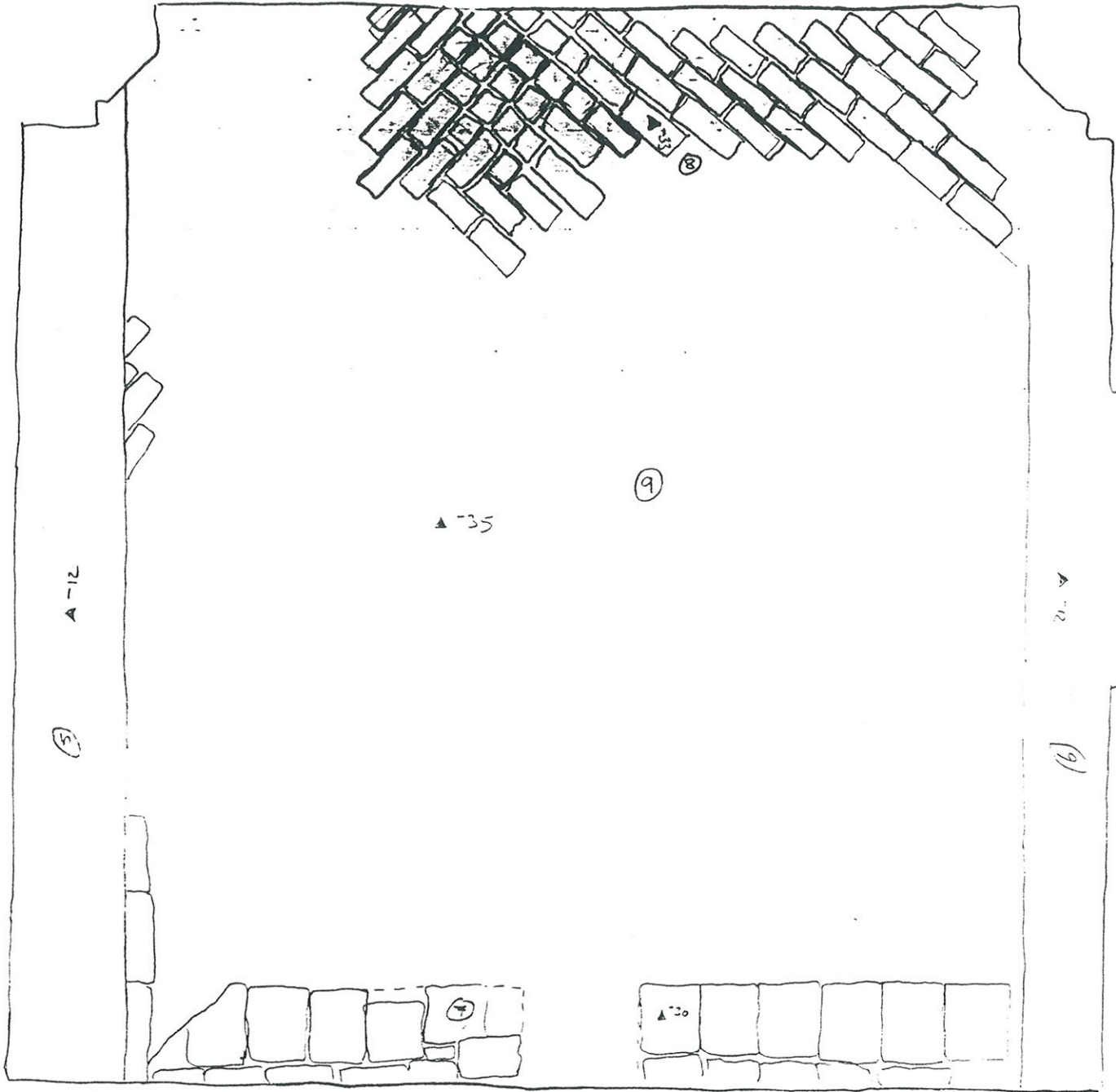
NETTLEBED, ST BARTHOLOMEWS CHURCH
NSBC 92
PLAN 1
LOCATION OF EXCAVATIONS
SCALE 1:250



NSBC 92
PLAN 2
SCALE 1:20
TOWER FLOOR

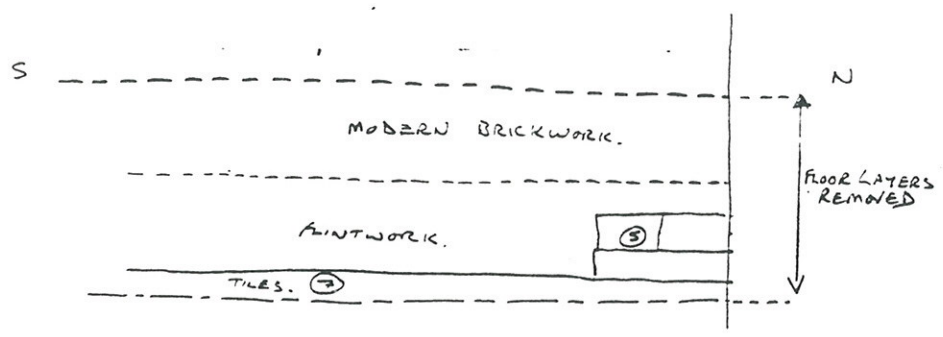
S. AISLE
FLOOR

▲ DATUM

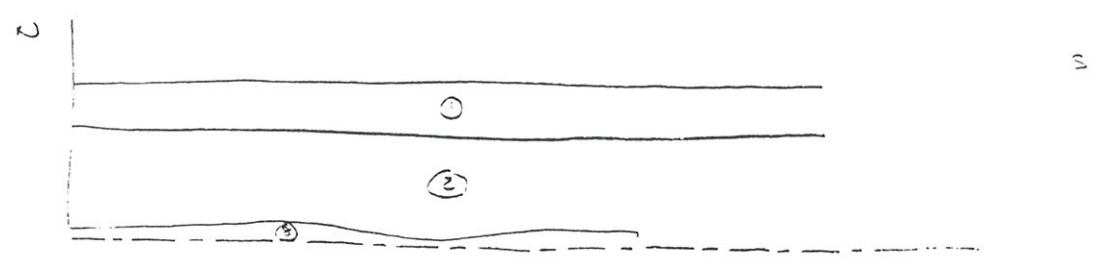


N ←

NSBC 92
SECTION 1
SCALE 1:20
WEST WALL OF TOWER



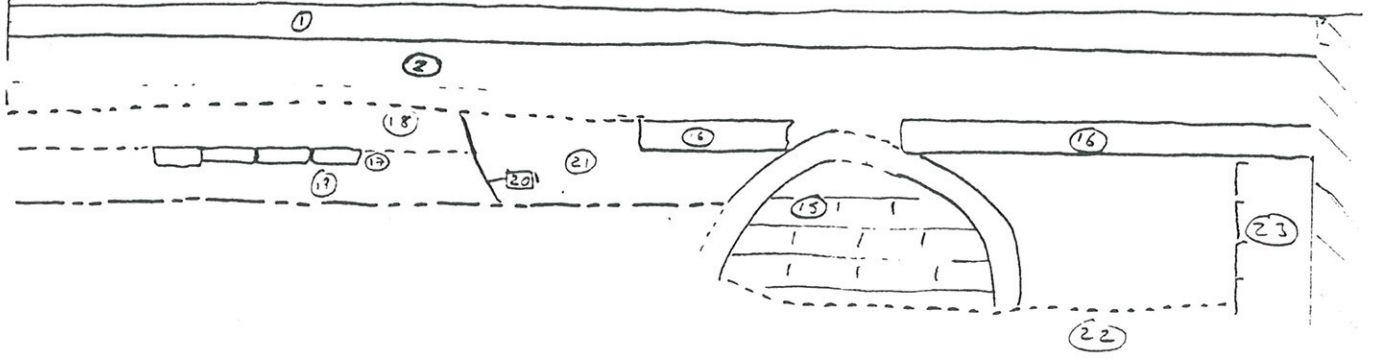
NSBC 92
SECTION 2
SCALE 1:20



NSBC 92
SECTION 3
SCALE 1:20

S
-EVEN OF
REMOVED FLOOR.

N.



NSBC 92
SECTION 4
SCALE 1:50
DRAINAGE TRENCH

