

St Mary's Church Chipping Norton Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

25th January 2002

Client Name:
Parochial Church Council

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1170

NGR: SP 2735 3117

Client Name: Parochial Church Council

Client Ref No:

Document Title: St Mary's Church, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: NGR SP 2735 3117

Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 1166

Site Code: CNMC02

Invoice Code: CNMCWB

Museum Accession No: 2002.32

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Document File Location Server3\JIM.MUMFORDS\OAU\wbREPORTS\Oxfordshire\StMaryChipNort.doc

Graphics File Location \\Server4\oapubs1\All drawings*CNMCWB*t Mary Church Chipping Norton*RMS*25.01.02

Illustrated by Roz Smith

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St Mary's Church, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In January 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 2735 3117). The work was commissioned by Mr M.C.Jaffe of the Parochial Church Council in advance of new raised floor in the east end of the Nave. The watching brief revealed that during the late 19th Century renovations the floors and two earlier vaults had been lowered prior to the making up and laying of a new floor.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In January 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (Fig.1). The work was commissioned by Mr M.C.Jaffe of the Parochial Church Council in respect of ground works prior to the construction of a new raised floor at the east end of the Nave.

1.1.2 A project brief was set by Julian Munby, Diocesan Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese of Oxford.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies at 173.95 m above OD on upper lias overlying great oolitic limestone.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The church is situated approximately 300 m north west of the market place in the centre of Chipping Norton, just south of the motte and bailey castle (Fig.2). The church dates initially from the 13th century with minor alterations until it was rebuilt in 1485. The church has one of the finest 15th century interiors in Oxfordshire. It has had numerous changes since then, including the tower being rebuilt in 1825 and extensive restoration work carried out from 1874 to 1876.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.

2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The wooden block floor tiles within the area of the new floor were lifted and the lime bedding below removed. The material below was reduced to level for the new floor. The mosaic tiled aisles were retained *in situ*. The 19th century heating ducts were removed and the vents in the aisle floors were raised to the level of the new floor. A

new service trench was excavated around the edge of the new floor with two access pits each side of the west end of the central aisle for new heating and services.

- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 After the wooden block flooring (1) had been lifted a lime mortar bedding 0.02 m thick laid on compact rubble hardcore (2) with a cement mix (0.10 m thick) was broken up. Constructed within this were cast concrete ducts (4) for heating pipes. These were 0.45 m wide and 0.3 m in depth with a 0.15 m wide channel down the centre for the piping. Below this was a dark yellowish brown silty sand (3) with fragments of stone, mortar, concrete and slate tile. This represented the 19th century floor make up on which the floor and ducting was laid.
- 3.1.2 Cutting into the floor make up layer in the south aisle was the remains of a limestone wall (5) two courses high and bonded with light grey lime mortar (0.3 x 0.8 x 0.2 m). It was trench built in a cut (6) with vertical sides and flat base and aligned east to west butting against the east wall. This is thought to a sleeper wall to support an earlier timber beam for a wooden floor prior to the construction of the present wooden block floor, as it was sealed below the hardcore layer.
- 3.1.3 Sealed below the make up layer was dark yellowish brown silty clay (7) with limestone specks and fragments. This appears to be the natural soil of the site.
- 3.1.4 The two holes for the new heating ducts measured approximately 3.8 m x 1 m and were excavated each side of the central aisle (Figs 3 & 4). These revealed the floor make up layers from the 19th century and two earlier vaults.
- 3.1.5 In the hole on the north side (Fig. 5) a large stone footing (9) was observed. This was constructed of two courses of reused limestone blocks bonded with a lime mortar. This supported the bedding (10) for the mosaic tile floor of the aisle. The make up (3) butted against it and these overlay a thin layer of ash (8). This represented the primary deposit of floor make up from the 19th century renovations. Sealed below this was a sub rectangular burial vault of limestone drystone construction (12) in a vertical sided cut (11). This had been lowered and filled with a dark brown silty sand loam (13) (Fig. 6, Section 1).
- 3.1.6 In the hole on the south side (Fig. 5) the upper part of the hole was the same as in the north hole. Sealed below an ash layer (8) were two earlier features. The first was an another limestone drystone constructed vault (15). This had been capped off with limestone slabs and the hole filled in with a dark reddish brown loam (16). Also in the west end of the hole a partly exposed sub circular charnel pit (17) with near

vertical sides cutting into the natural (6), and was filled with a very dark brown silty sand loam (18) with a number of human bones (see Fig. 6, section 2).

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No finds were recovered from the watching brief. All human remains were either undisturbed or reinterred in the holes.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken from the site.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The results from the ground work suggest that the floor levels were reduced and built up again during the late 1800 renovations, and in the area of the raised floor any earlier archaeology may have been removed. In the area of the central aisle were two possibly 18th century burial vaults. These had been lowered and filled in during the 19th century renovations. This could explain the large stone footing (9) for the tiled central aisle. An earlier charnel pit next to one of the vaults could relate to disturbed burials from the vaults construction.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer				Wooden block Flooring	None
2	Layer				Bedding for floor	None
3	Layer				19 th Century Floor Make up	None
4	Structure				19 th Century Ducting	None
5	Wall				Sleeper wall	None
6	Cut				Foundation cut	
7	Natural				Natural	
8	Layer				Construction Layer	None
9	Structure				Support wall	None
10	Deposit				Tiled Floor bedding	None
11	Cut				Vault Cut	
12	Structure				Stone lining of vault	
13	Fill				Material filling vault	None
14	Cut				Vault Cut	
15	Structure				Stone lining of vault	
16	Fill				Material filling vault	None
17	Cut				Charnel pit	
18	Fill				Fill of Pit	None

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

D Wilkinson, 1992, *OAU Fieldwork Manual*.

Nickolaus Pevsner, 1960, *The buildings of England: Oxfordshire*.

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Mary's Church, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

Site code: CNMC 02

Grid reference: NGR SP 2735 3117

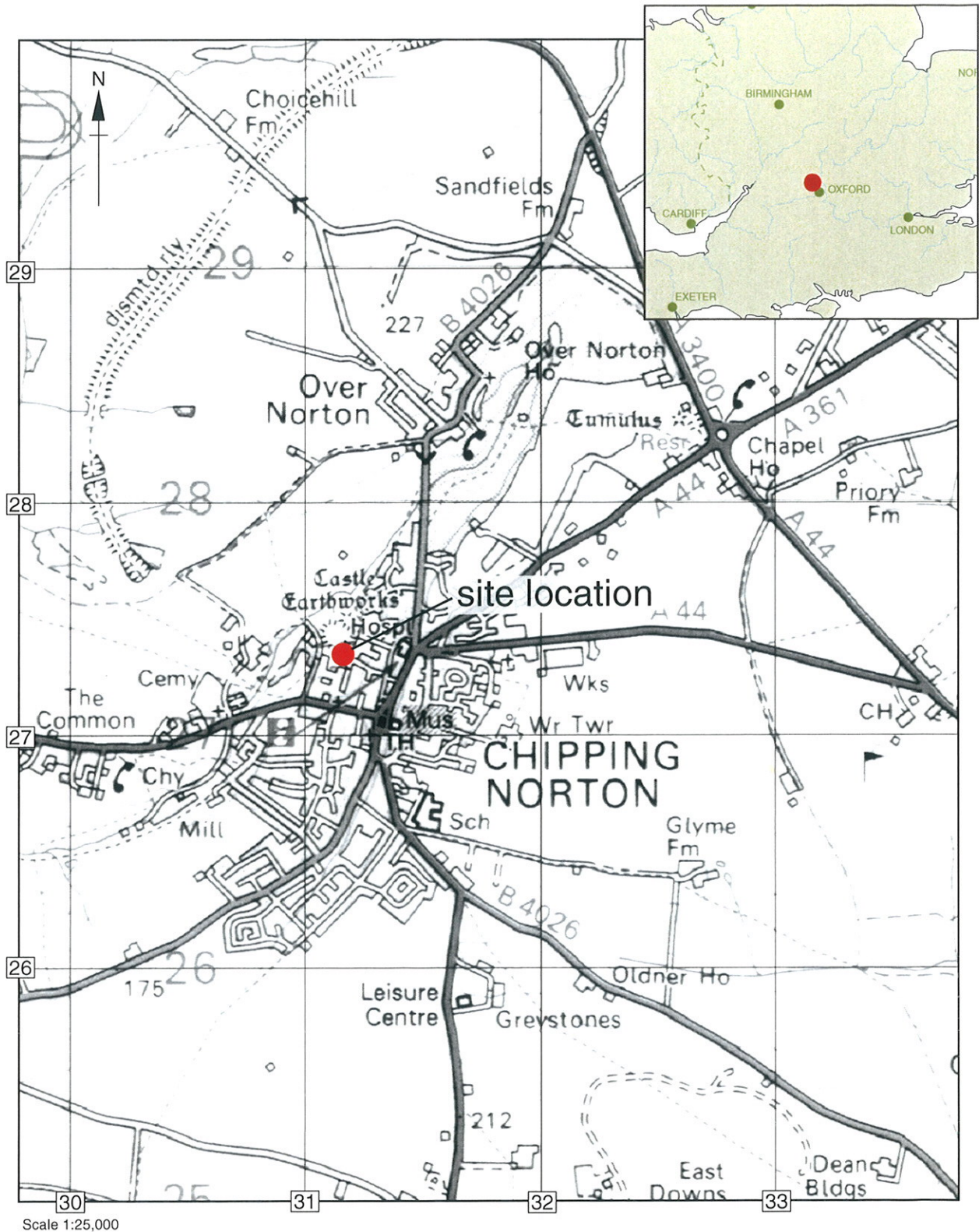
Type of watching brief: monitoring the reduction of old floor for the construction of new raised floor.

Date and duration of project: Three site visits from 11th January to 23rd January 2002

Area of site: 19 m x 5 m approximately

Summary of results: The results from the watching brief revealed that during the 19th renovation of the church, the floors and two vaults under the central aisle were lowered and the new floor made up and laid over it.

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: 2002.32



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site Location

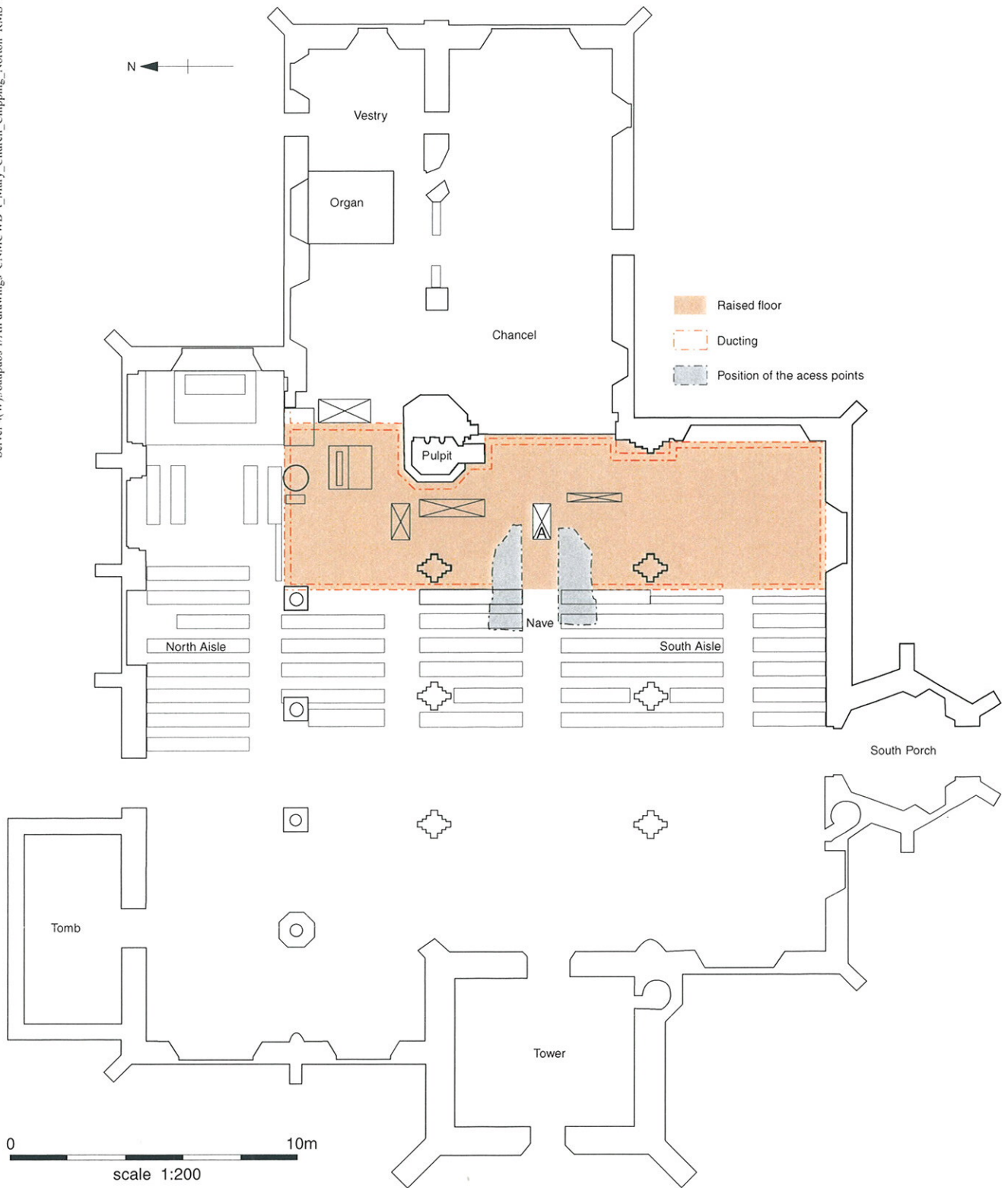


Figure 3: Plan Showing Area of New Raised Floor and New Service Trench

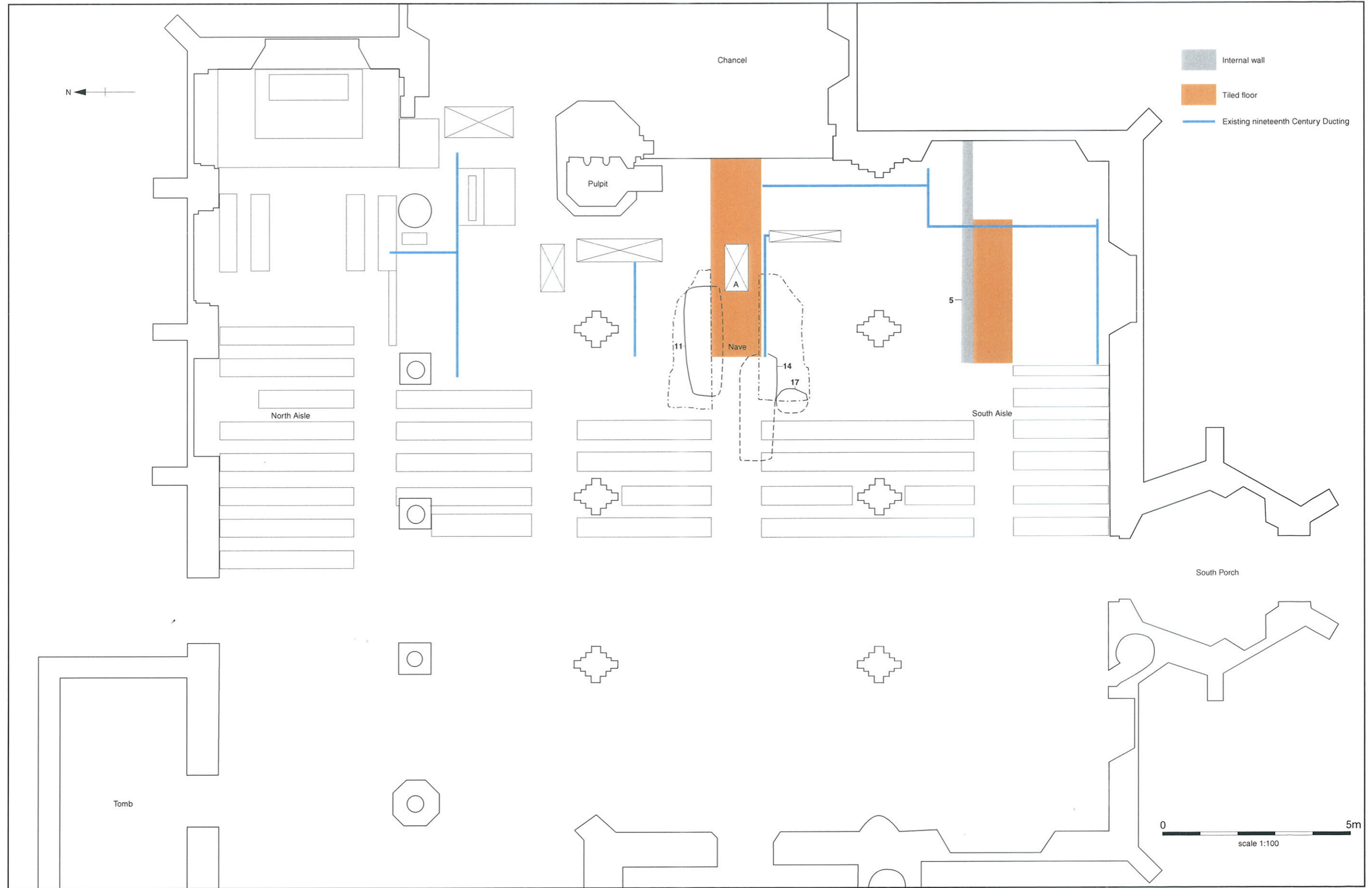


Figure 4: Plan Showing Features and Ducting

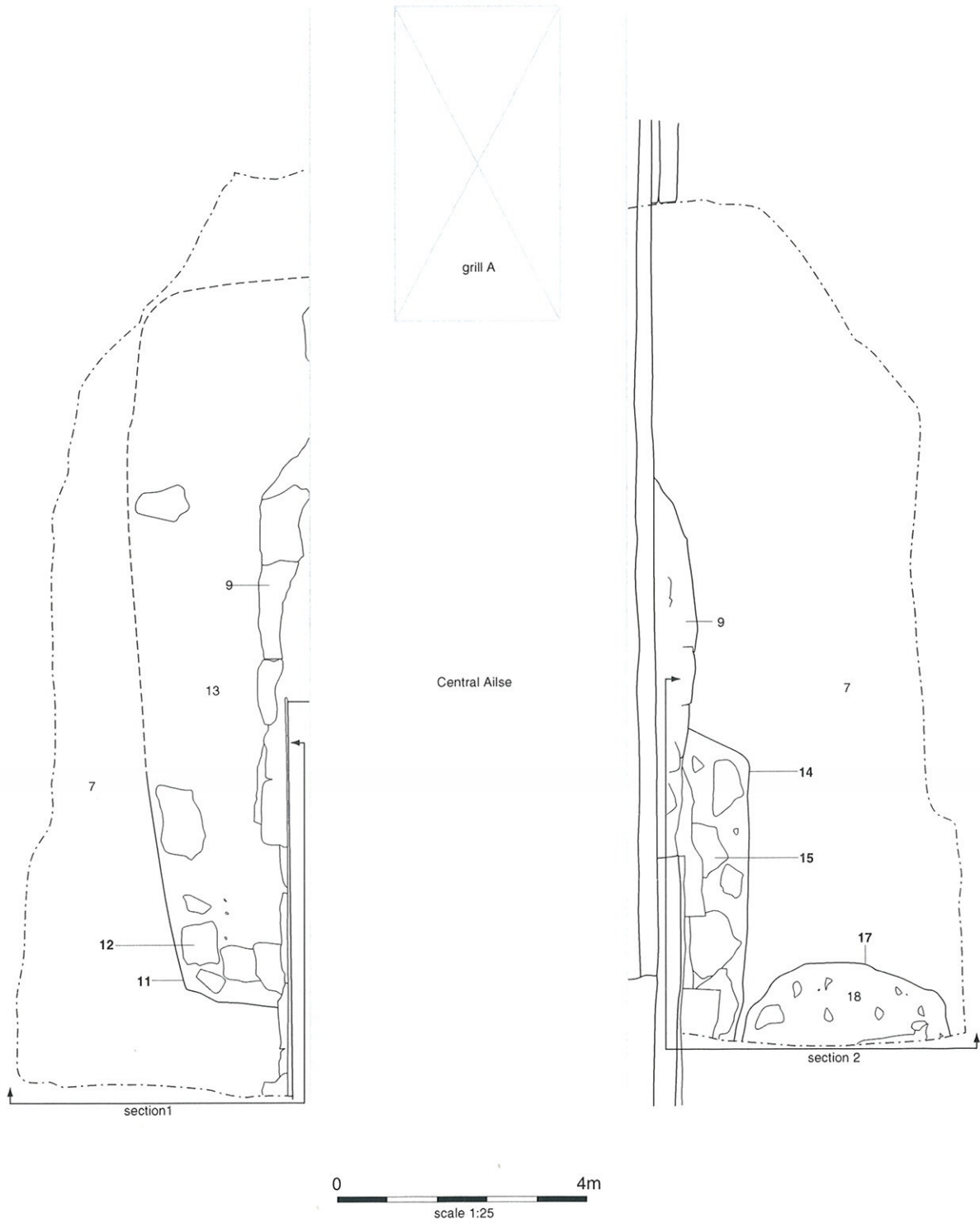
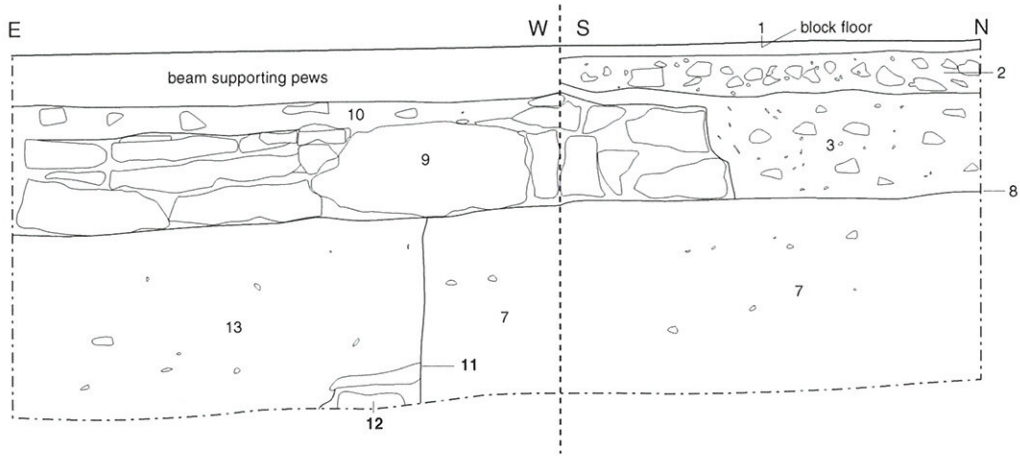


Figure 5: Plan of Access Holes

Section 1



Section 2

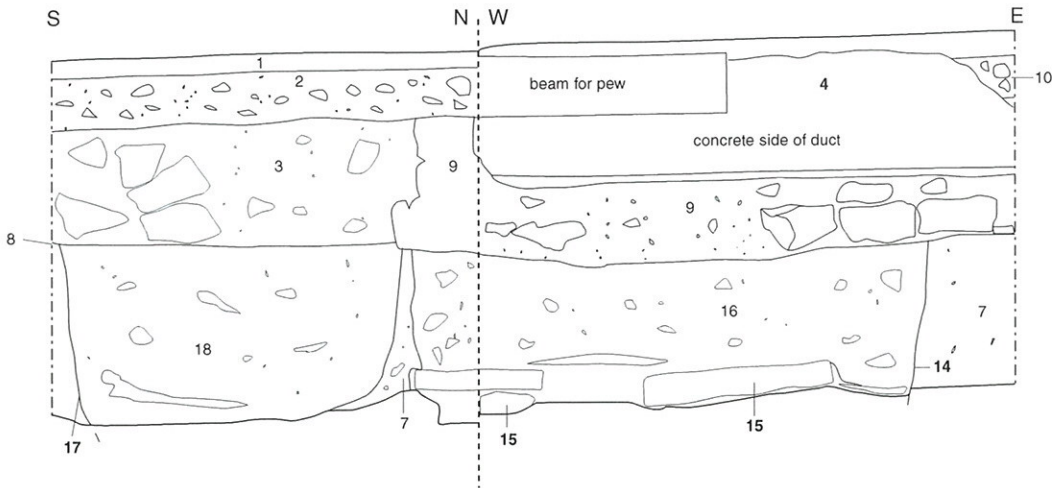


Figure 6: Sections



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