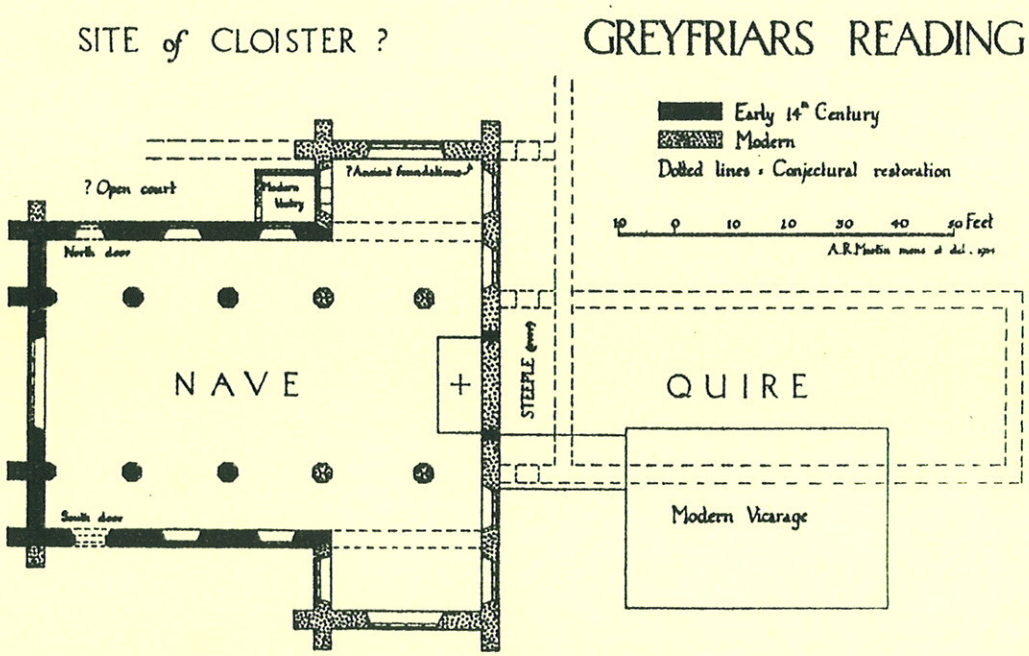
Maguire & Co

Greyfriars Church, Reading

NGR SU 7120 7390

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEST PIT EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF REPORT



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Date:	July 2000
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Date:	August 2000
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Date:	August 2000

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Summary

A limited programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken during building works at this church between February and April 2000. The work was carried out during the installation of a new `total immersion font' at the east end of the church. A test pit was excavated by OAU in February 2000 and a watching brief was maintained during the course of further intrusive groundwork for the installation of additional services. The work was undertaken on behalf the church and was commissioned by MacGuire & Co., architects, of Thame. The programme of archaeological work was requested by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor due to the possibility of encountering medieval remains of the church.

The test pit was excavated to the level of the natural gravel and revealed a build-up of c 1 m of Victorian and later deposits. A modern service trench occupied part of the test pit, that otherwise contained `made ground' fills including Victorian and later building materials. No significant archaeological deposits were observed within the limits of the test pit.

The modern service trench extended around the nave and also cut through part of a semi-circular well? structure that may have related to a former water supply associated with the period when the church was re-used as a prison. The brick type suggests a post-medieval date for this structure. Other post-medieval features were identified in the extended area of the new immersion font pit. Part of a wall, possibly a fireplace, was recorded overlying a deposit that included clay pipes, pottery and tile and is therefore of post-medieval date.

The foundation cut for the 12th century church wall was identified in one of the service pits at the west side of the nave. The remainder of the service pits were generally only 0.2 m deep and were cut through the modern make-up for the present church floor. Disarticulated skeletal remains from two adult males were recovered from two modern deposits, indicating that building work has in the past disturbed burials at this church. The date of the skeletal remains is uncertain.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Maguire & Co Architects (on behalf of the Vicar and Churchwardens) to undertake an archaeological investigation at Greyfriars Church, Reading, Berkshire in February 2000.

1.2 The archaeological work was requested by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor in advance of proposals to construct a total immersion font at the east end of the church with additional ancillary services. The site work followed on from a desk-based assessment of the church that was undertaken by OAU in November 1999 on behalf of the same clients (OAU, November 1999).

1.3 A test pit was excavated in accordance with advice given by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, contained within a Written Specification of Work for the project. This was followed by a watching brief carried out during additional groundwork, principally on the lowering of part of the church floor and small pits excavated for the installation of new services.

1.4 This report summarises the archaeological background to the site and presents a report on the finds from the test pit, and the results of the watching brief. This document supersedes an interim report submitted to the client in March 2000.

2 Geology and Topography

2.1 The geology of the site is Valley Gravel terrace. The church is situated on the northern edge of this gravel terrace that gradually slopes down to the River Thames Alluvium to the north (*British Geological Survey Sheet 268*).

2.2 Greyfriars Church is located due south-west of the present railway station in St Laurence's Parish within the north-west corner of historic Reading. The church is bounded today by Friar Street (formerly New Street) to the south, to the west by Caversham Road and to the east by Greyfriars Road, with properties on the south side of Sackville Street backing onto the Church's north boundary (Figure 1).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Reading is located on a gravel terrace between the valleys of the River Kennet and the River Thames to the north. There is artefactual evidence from the centre of Reading for occupation from the Palaeolithic period onward, though no prehistoric or Roman sites have been identified within the area of the medieval town. The first documentary evidence for Reading comes from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which records that the Danes spent the winter in Reading during 870-1 AD. The Chronicle also reports a Danish fortress and a 9th century royal *vill* near Reading. Astill has suggested that the royal *vill* may be located to the west of Reading Abbey (founded in 1164) which is situated *c* 300 m south-east of Greyfriars Church, within the area of St Mary's Church (Astill, 1978, 77). Domesday Book refers to Reading's royal borough with its market as separate from its manor, indicating that it was a Saxon town before the Conquest. The precise outline of the Saxon town has never been fully established.

3.2 Reading Abbey dominated the early medieval town and in the 12th and 13th centuries a large market place was established outside its main gate with two parallel roads (Broad Street and New Street, now Friar Street) extending to the west. Greyfriars church was situated at the west end of New Street. The church was first documented in 1186, and marked the western limit of the medieval town until the 18th century. By the later 13th century the Abbey's economic prosperity and influence on the town declined and by the time of its dissolution in 1539 Reading had become an independent, major town in Berkshire (Astill 1978, 75,78).

3.3 Parts of Reading were rebuilt during the late-16th and early-17th centuries, and the town continued to prosper during the Civil War, when both the Parliamentary and Royal forces occupied the town. Traditional industries such as cloth and leather working began to decline and were eventually replaced by other important economic activities such as the cattle and horse fair and the Cornmarket. By the late 18th century Reading had begun to prosper economically again, helped by the construction of the Kennet and Avon canal in 1810. This prosperity resulted in rebuilding of the town centre during the late 18th and 19th centuries (Astill (1978, 76).

4 The Greyfriars Church

4.1 In 1233 the Abbey granted permission for Franciscan friars to build a church on land by the king's highway leading to Caversham Bridge (VCH II, 89). The lands often flooded, and the friars asked for a new site. The archbishop of Canterbury (a Franciscan) personally petitioned the abbey on their behalf, and in 1285 the Abbey permitted a new church to be built in the town on its present site. Plots of land in New Street (now Friar Street) were bequeathed in 1288 by Robert Fulco, and a new church and domestic quarters were completed about 1311, including an orchard to its rear within its 20 acres of land (Dyer 1988, 3-4).

4.2 The church was surrendered to the Crown in 1538 as part of Henry VIII's Dissolution. In 1542 the nave and side aisles were granted to the borough for use as a new guildhall. The rest of the church, including the friary buildings and land was sold to Robert Stanshawe, a Groom of the King's Chamber (Dyer 1988, 6). The building briefly functioned as the town's Guildhall, but proved unsuitable and subsequently became a poorhouse and hospital for the poor in 1578 (Dyer 1988, 6).

4.3 In 1590 a proposal was made to convert the poorhouse into a Borough Bridewell (prison), although this was not carried out until 1613. During its conversion into a prison the church underwent a number of building alterations. The arcades were bricked up and wooden partitions and cells were constructed in both aisles, and by 1810 the roof of the nave had been removed to create an open space for an exercise yard (Martin 1937).

4.4 The original church building had additions to its south, east and north exterior walls. In 1808 'Austwick's House', which had replaced an earlier 16th century house, was built against the bricked up arcade on the east side of the nave, over the site of the demolished quire. It later became the vicarage until it was demolished and replaced by a modern vicarage in 1963.

4.5 The chancel was referred to in 1816 as 'being demolished many years before'. Also in 1816 the prison keepers house 'Keepers Cottage' was built against the south aisle, facing Friar Street, and a public house was built to the east of the cottage against the church's south aisle. The prison was closed in 1844 when a new prison was built in Reading (Dyer 1988, 7), and the original building fell into disrepair before its Victorian restoration (see OAU, November 1999).

5 Results

N.b. Site levels are not related to Ordnance Datum; levels are relative to the finished floor level.

5.1 Test Pit

The test pit was excavated in the area of the proposed total immersion font (Fig 2). The pit location was determined by the site contractors who removed the floor tiles and underlying concrete make-up. Thereafter excavation of the pit was undertaken by OAU by hand; the pit measured 1 m x 1 m and was 1.2 m deep (Fig 3).

At the base of the pit the earliest excavated deposit was natural gravel (10). This was overlain by a layer of loose brown-red silty sand (3) that contained flint pieces, tile fragments and brick pieces to a maximum depth of 0.52 m. This layer was overlain by, or had set within its matrix, the remains of a brick structure (4). The wall was two courses high (0.2 m) and was constructed of red bricks bonded with sandy mortar. The bricks were separated by a layer of compact yellow-white sand (11) that was 0.02 m thick; this may have acted as a bonding agent. The structure, perhaps a wall, was 0.32 m wide and was

truncated to the north-east by a later service trench (8); the function of the structure is unclear, but it is of Victorian or later date.

The wall was surrounded by a 0.36 m thick deposit of light reddish-brown silty sand (6) that included crushed mortar and fragments of modern floor tile. This layer was cut by a modern service trench (8) that was aligned north-west - south east across the trench. The cut was 0.86 m wide and 0.78 m deep and was filled by at its base by a compacted layer of mortar (5) that acted as the bedding for a brick retaining wall (12) of the trench. The wall was a minimum of 1.04 m in length and comprised 7 courses of bricks bonded with a grey cement. The wall was abutted by the backfill (7 = 17) of the service trench that comprised red-brown clay silt including flint, charcoal and tile together with a few pieces of animal bone.

Above the backfill of the service trench lay a compact light grey concrete deposit (9 = 16), in turn sealed by a further thin concrete layer (2 = 15). The final deposit in the test pit was the Victorian/modern tiled flooring (1).

5.2 The new font excavation

The area of the test pit was extended by the contractors under archaeological supervision (Fig. 4). At the north-west corner of the site of the new font, the earliest deposit was a mixed brown silt and charcoal layer (22) that contained no finds. This was overlain by a further layer of charcoal rich material (21) containing animal bone, pottery, and clay pipe stems which indicate that the layer was of post-medieval date. Abutting this layer was the remains of a red ceramic tile floor (20) comprising tiles measuring 270 mm x 140 mm x 15 mm thick. A single course of tiles was present and the tiles were bonded with a yellow sandy mortar.

The remains of this floor were overlain by a structural feature comprising red 'frogged' bricks (19) bonded with a yellow sandy mortar. The bricks measured 220 mm x 110 mm x 70 mm and four courses remained *in situ*. The bricks formed the remains of a wall aligned approximately west-east, and the presence of charcoal within the immediate deposits adjacent may suggest that the structure was once part of a fireplace. It is possible that the structure was associated with the prison phase of the church building. The remains of the wall were sealed beneath a make-up layer (18) that supported the church floor, and which also sealed the fill of service trench 8.

At the east side of the new font excavation area at the base of the trench was the remains of a brick-built floor. The bricks were laid flat into a layer of mortar and formed the base of part of Victorian service trench 8. The bricks were frogged and measured 220 mm x 100 mm x 65 mm. The bricks were bonded with a yellow sandy mortar/cement - a total area of 6 m (north-south) by 1.1 m (east-west) was observed. The bricks were of a similar type to those used in the construction of structure 19 and the two features may therefore be contemporary and be associated with the prison phase of the building.

5.3 Watching brief on new service pits

A total of 27 service pits were excavated by the contractors under archaeological supervision (Figs 2 and 5). The pits were usually 0.2 m deep and measured 0.3 x 0.3 m square or 0.4 x 0.4 m square. In general the pits were cut through the underlying make-up deposits for the church floor, which were usually archaeologically sterile. However in a number of pits there were structures and/or finds that were worthy of note. These are detailed below.

Pit 20 (Fig. 5)

At the base of Pit 20 the was a layer of brown silt (25) through which was observed a cut feature (26) that contained the foundation stone rubble (27) of the west wall of the church. The stones comprised chalk and flint pieces set in a matrix of light brown sand and silt. The fill of the trench was overlain by the general rubble beneath the floor of the church.

Pit 21 (Fig. 5)

Work reducing the floor at the west end of the nave to the immediate east of pit 21 revealed the truncated remains of a semi-circular brick structure (24). The structure was revealed beneath a concrete capping. The structure comprised red bricks bonded with a grey mortar, and measured 230 mm x 110 mm x 60 mm. Three courses of bricks were observed. The structure may have been a well which provided a water supply for the prison in the post-medieval period.

Pit 27

The layer of make-up (13) beneath the tiled floor contained three pieces of architectural worked stone (see finds report, below), suggesting that the restoration phase of work had in part demolished stonework and some of the pieces were used during the construction of the present floor.

6 The Finds

No medieval pottery or human remains were recovered from the excavated deposits within the test pit. Floor tile and animal bone were recovered from demonstrably Victorian deposits forming the make-up levels beneath the present floor. Further work in the area of the total immersion font and the excavation of the service pits produced a small quantity of materials. These are summarised below:

6.1 The architectural stone

Three pieces of worked architectural stone were recovered from the excavated deposits within the church (Small finds 1, 2 and 3). The pieces were analysed by Julian Munby at the OAU.

Small find 1 - part of a window mullion, greensand/clunch stone. Measures 0.15 m by 0.11 m. Part of same piece as small find 3. Late medieval, 14th-15th century.

Small find 2 - Part of a window mullion with a glazing groove on one side, roll and hollow. Oolitic limestone. Whitewashed on one side. Measurements: 0.25 m by 0.15 m. Late medieval, 14th-15th century.

Small find 3 - Window mullion with glazing groove and small hole for firmament. Plain fillet and hollow. Whitewashed and exhibits mason's tooling marks on one side. Greensand/clunch stone. Measurements: 0.3 m by 0.15 m. Late medieval, 14th-15th century.

6.2 The pottery and ceramic building material

A total of 11 sherds of pottery were recovered from the excavated deposits. None of the material was medieval. The sherds comprise 4 of white china, one piece of which has plain decoration. The remainder are red earthenware with a grey-green glaze, of typical post-medieval form.

6.3 Clay pipes and glass

A total of 5 pieces of clay pipe was recovered from the excavated deposits. All of the pieces were from stems; no bowls were recovered. The pieces are undiagnostic, and a general post-medieval date is assigned to these. A single neck from a glass bottle was recovered; it is of post-medieval date.

6.4 Human bone by Angela Boyle

A small assemblage of disarticulated bone was recovered from modern make-up or backfill deposits. None of the material was found *in situ* or associated with any burials. The bones are, however, likely to have been disturbed from their original locations during previous work at the church. Human skeletal remains were recovered from contexts 7 and 18 during a watching brief. The material has been examined and the results are presented in the table below.

Ctx	Type	Date	Identifiable bones	Age	Sex	Comments
7	Backfill in service trench 8	Modern, 20th century, cutting Victorian deposits	Temporal, occipital, cervical body, right humerus shaft, ulna midshaft, right 1st metatarsal	Middle adult	?Male	Periostitis affects two fragments of rib shaft, marked deltoid insertion
18	Deposit, cut by 8	Victorian or later date	Skull vault, mandible fragment, femoral head, mid shaft of tibia, rib shaft	Young adult	Male	AM loss of right mandibular premolars

Inflammation of the periosteum, which is present on two rib shaft fragments, is indicative of a non-specific infectious process leading to the ossification of the periosteum which is the membrane surrounding the cortex of bone in life. The

bones appear to represent some of the remains of two males interred in the church, though the date of their original burial is uncertain.

6.5 **Animal bone** by Bethan Charles

A total of 156 fragments of bone were recovered from four contexts, the majority of bones coming from post-medieval deposits; upon re-assembly, the count was lowered to 44. The majority of the bones exhibited a good degree of preservation. Most identifiable bones were cattle, including 8 mandible and skull fragments (context 18) and part of a female cattle pelvis; two of the cattle mandible fragments had chop/cut marks. The sheep bones from this context included a mandible from an animal aged 4-6 years and part of a skull that had been severed in two; part of a pig skull was also present in this context. Identified fragments from other contexts included part of a pig mandible aged 2-7 months, part of a cattle mandible (context 21) and two poorly preserved cattle bones from context 28. Bones from modern service trench (7) included cattle and sheep vertebrae that had been cut down the middle (sagittal cleaving), consistent with hanging the carcass for butchering. The bone assemblage is tabulated below.

Table of animal bones by feature, period, context and species

Feature	Period	Context	Cattle	Sheep	Pig	Unidentified	Total
Service trench	Modern	7	3	1	0	2	6
Layer	Post-medieval	18	11	2	1	9	23
Layer	Post-medieval	21	2	0	1	10	13
Layer	Post-medieval	28	2	0	0	0	2
Totals		-	**18**	**3**	**2**	**21**	**44**

This small bone assemblage reflects the limited nature of the investigation. However, the majority of the bones were from feet, the skull and jaw, which may indicate a low status diet that may be expected of the site during its prison and post-prison period. Some of the skull and jaw bones exhibited butchery marks that might suggest that meat from the skulls was consumed. The size of the cattle and sheep bones is indicative of the improved breeds prevalent after the post-medieval period. The single sheep mandible aged between 4 and 6 years may indicate that the majority of the sheep originated from wool farms, and were killed towards the end of their useful life.

7 Conclusions

The initial test pit was dug down to the level of the natural gravel. No medieval deposits or human remains were discovered within the pit fills. The depth of deposits suggest that at the time of the restoration of the church, material was imported to raise the ground level to that required for the formation of the present floor level. It is unclear from the test pit whether this also involved the removal of earlier deposits from this area of the church. The function of the ?wall (4) is unclear, but may be the remains of a Victorian

service duct, possibly for heating or drainage, subsequently removed when the modern service trench (8) was constructed.

The watching brief on the remainder of the building works revealed some finds of note. The structure interpreted tentatively as a fireplace is likely to belong with the prison phase of the building, given the post-medieval finds found in association with the adjacent deposits. The semi-circular structure found adjacent to test pit 21 may relate also to this phase of the use of the building, serving as a well. Interpretation of these structural remains must remain tentative given the limited areas available for investigation. Nonetheless it is clear that the church buildings were subject to a number of modifications in the post-medieval period.

Of interest are the 3 pieces of worked stone: the stones appear to have come from two separate windows, which were presumably part of the new church and domestic quarters that were completed in *c* AD 1311 (Dyer 1988, 3-4). Of note is the small hole in stone 3 that held the metal grate for the window glass and a small setting out mark/groove could be seen on the stone adjacent to this hole. The stones were whitewashed, giving an impression of how the church may have been decorated in the 14th century. None of the pieces were found *in situ*; all were recovered from rubble make-up deposits excavated within Pit 27, suggesting that at the time of the Victorian restoration, at least two windows were dismantled in the course of the work and the stones then reused as part of the levelling process for the new church floor.

The presence of the bones from two skeletons in modern deposits indicates that there has been disturbance of some burials at some point in antiquity. The date of these burials is unclear, and may relate either to the original church, or indeed the prison phase.

The remainder of the finds require little comment, although it can be suggested that the number of post-medieval artefacts demonstrates that activity of this period was quite intense, but the full-scale of the use of the church buildings at this time could only be demonstrated by further and more extensive excavation.

A Bingham and J Hiller
July 2000

Appendix 1: Table of Context Information

Context No.	Type	Depth	Width	Comments
1	Layer	0.02m	-	Modern tiled floor surface
2	Layer	0.03m	-	Concrete make-up
3	Deposit	0.52m	-	Victorian backfill, flint, 4 sherds red earthenware, red internal glazing, C19 date; 2 pieces roof tile, no decoration
4	Wall	0.20m	0.32m	Remnants (two courses) of wall
5	Deposit	0.06m	0.50m	Modern construction trample
6	Deposit	0.36m	-	Victorian backfill. (Crushed tile)
7	Deposit	0.72m	0.86m	Backfill of modern service trench, contained 28 pieces of disarticulated human bone, disturbed in antiquity by former works at the church. Also contained 6 pieces of animal bone
8	Cut	0.78m	0.86m	Modern service trench
9	Layer	0.09m	-	Concrete make-up
10	Layer	0.30m	-	Natural gravel
11	Deposit	0.02m	-	Sand mortar
12	Wall	0.8 m	-	Modern service trench wall
13	Layer	0.4 m	-	Rubble make-up for church floor, contained 3 architectural stones
14	Trench	0.85 m	1.8 m	Font construction trench
15	Layer	0.2 m	-	Floor make-up deposit of flint and sand
16	Layer	0.1 m	-	Demolition/make-up layer of brick and mortar
17	Fill	0.5 m	-	Fill of 8
18	Layer	0.33 m	1 m>	General make-up layer, contained 21 pieces of disarticulated human bone, disturbed in antiquity by former works at the church. Also contained 130 pieces of animal bone
19	Structure	0.31 m	0.36 m	Brick structure, possible fireplace, post-medieval prison phase? 1 brick sample retained for archive; possibly Victorian.
20	Structure	0.43 m	0.24 m	Tile and mortar floor, contemporary with 19 - prison phase. Piece of roof tile incorporated in build.
21	Layer	0.3 m	1 m>	Charcoal rich deposit with 7 sherds of post-medieval pottery (4 white china, 3 glazed red earthenware) and 5 pieces of stems from clay pipes (undiagnostic, no bowl forms to inform on precise date. One neck post-medieval glass wine bottle. One sherd ceramic building material. Also contained 16 pieces of animal bone. Prison phase activity
22	Layer	0.2 m	1.5 m>	Mixed silt and charcoal
23	Structure	-	1.1 m>	Brick flooring reused at base of service trench 8
24	Structure	-	-	Semi-circular brick structure, possibly a well of post-medieval date, associated with either prison phase or Victorian restoration
25	Layer	0.28 m	-	Layer of homogeneous brown silt seen in test pits 19,20,

				21 and 22; contained animal bone
26	Cut	-	0.5 m>	Foundation trench for the church wall
27	Fill	-	-	Fill of 26
28	Layer	-	-	Grey-brown silt seen in test pits 19, 20. Contained 17 pieces of animal bone
29	Layer	-	-	Mid-brown silt in area of structure 24

Appendix 2 Bibliography

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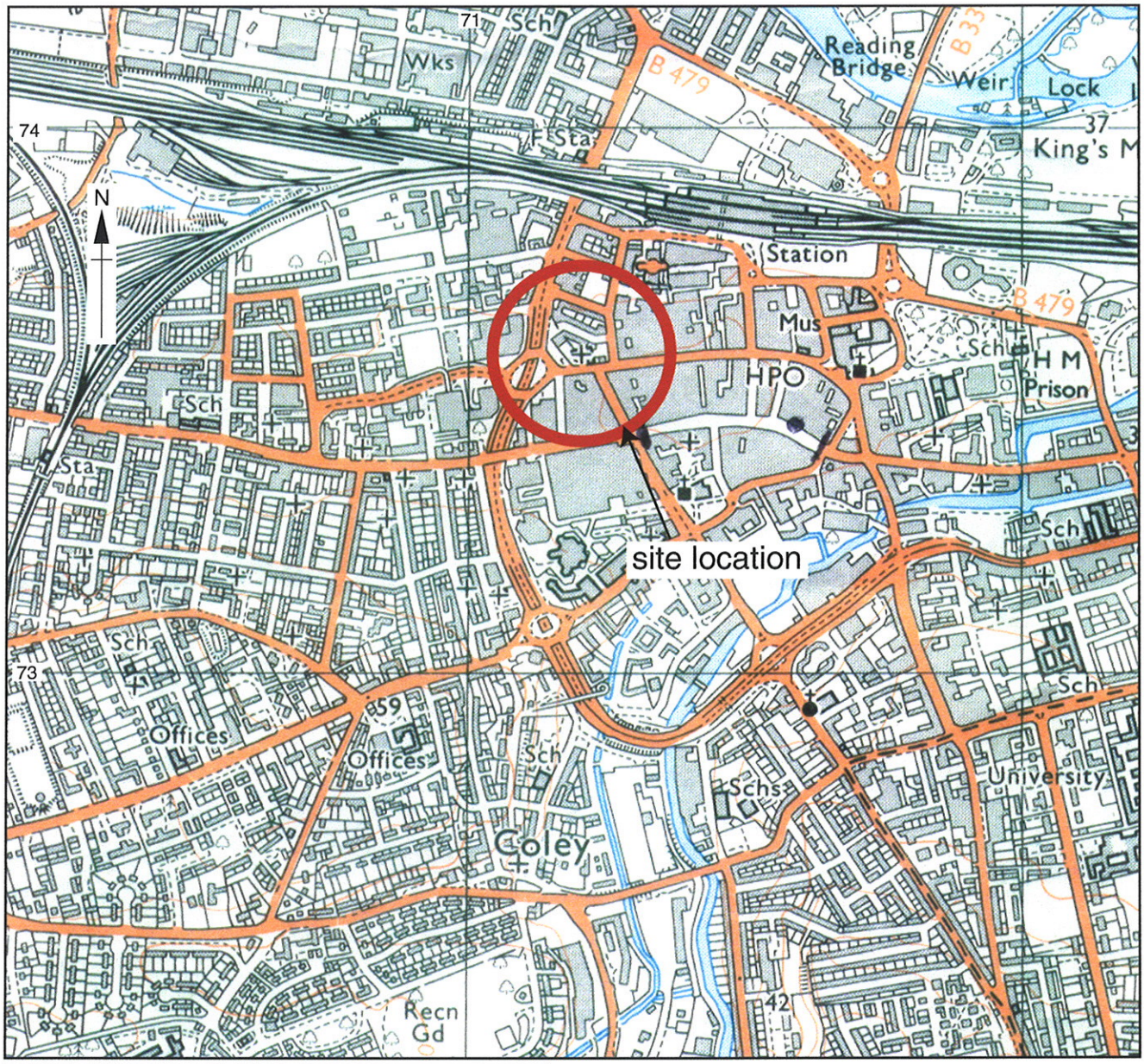

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Figure 1: Site location

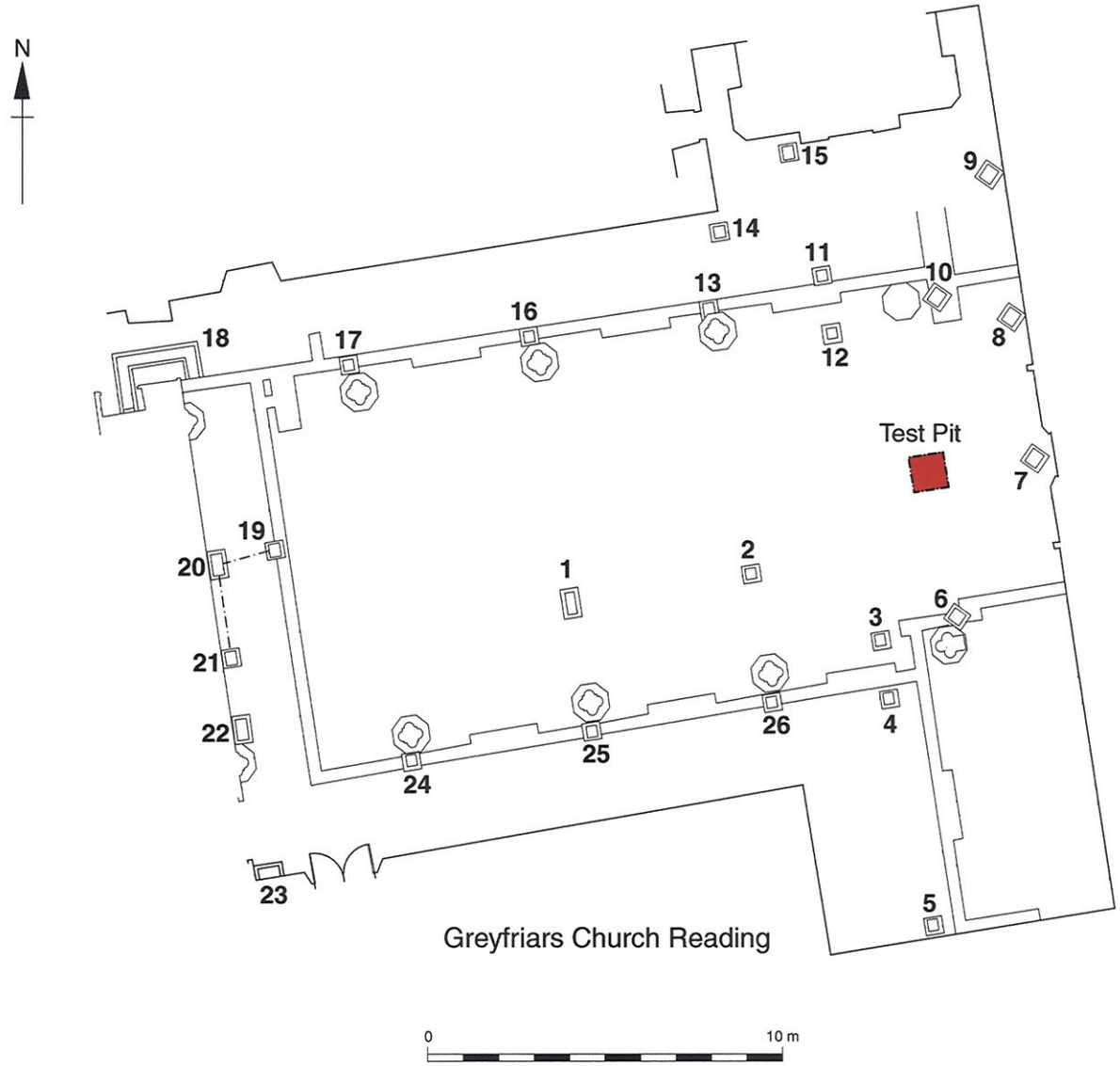


Figure 2: Test pit location

Section 1

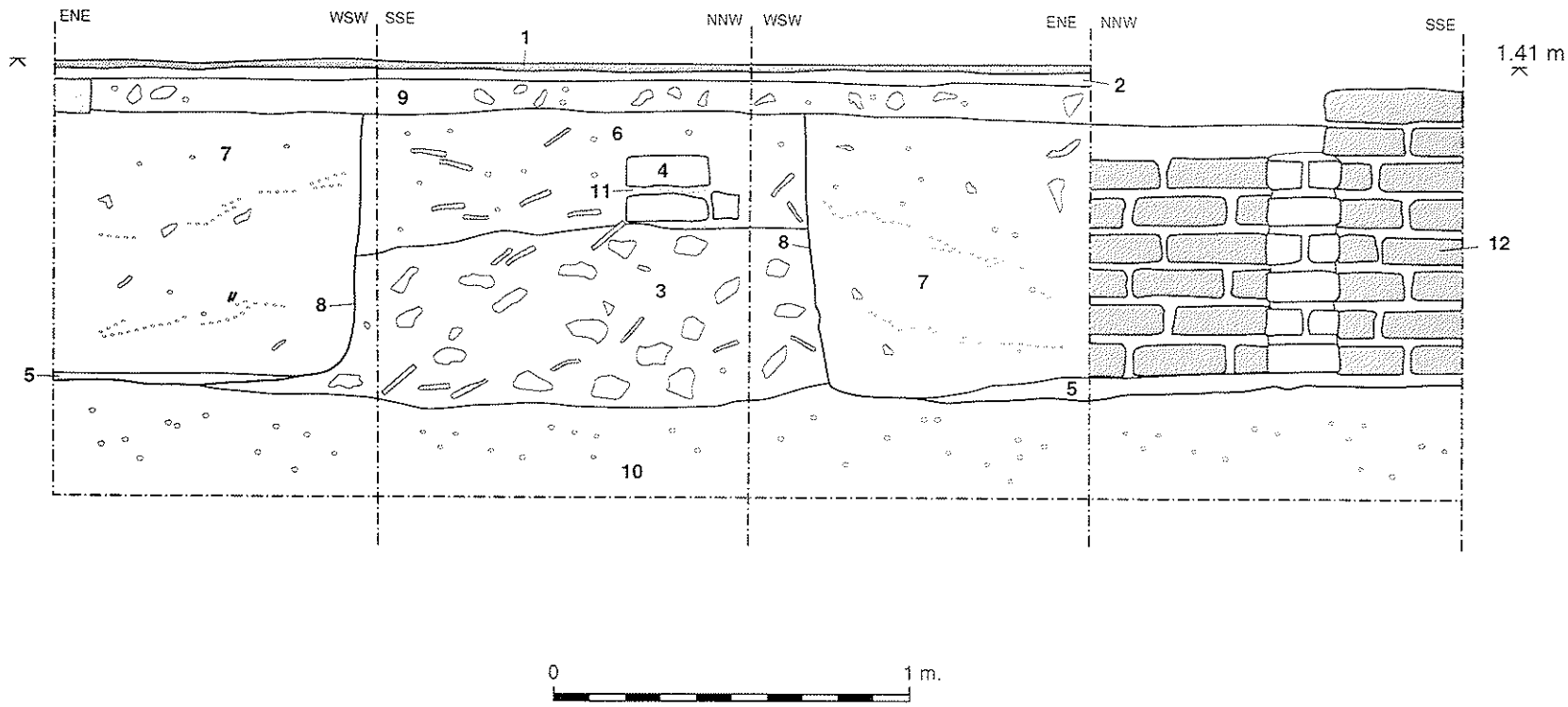
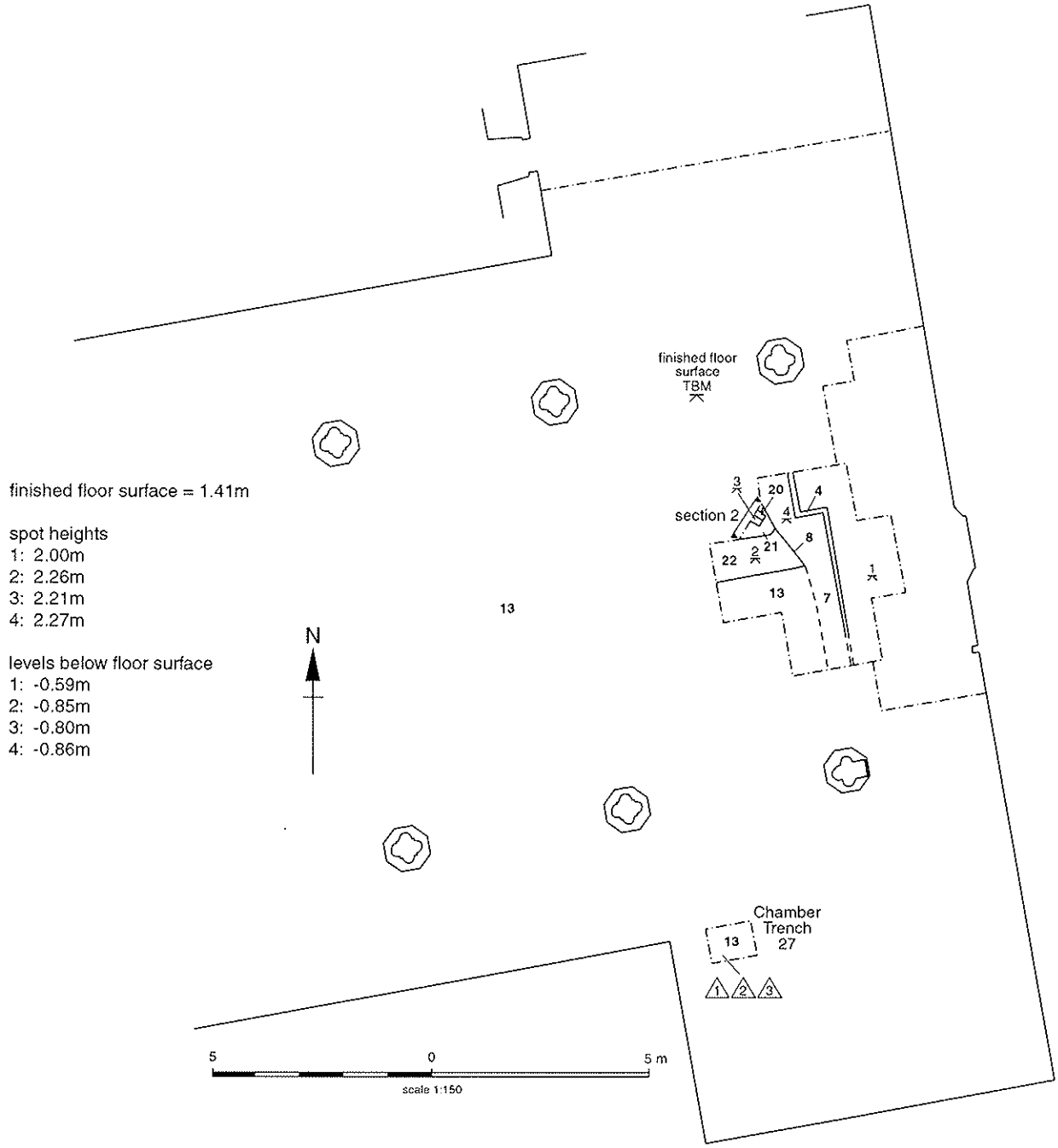


Figure 3: Section 1, the 4 sides of test pit 1.



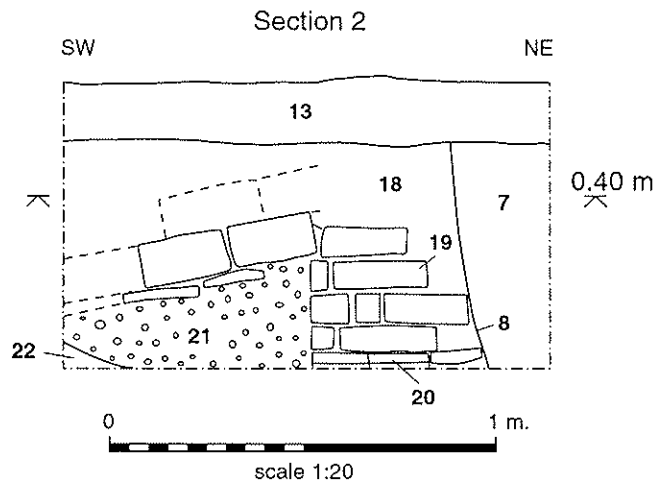


Figure 4: Area plan of font excavation, and section

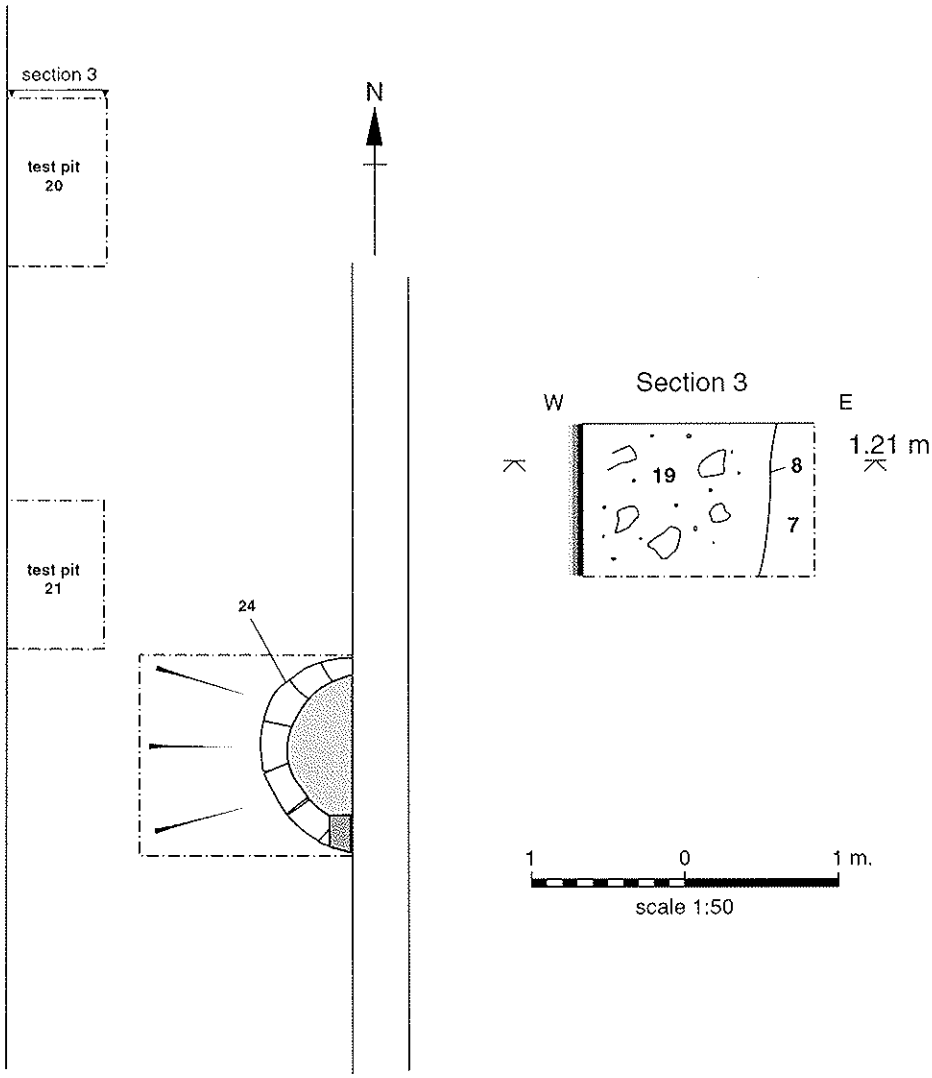


Figure 5: Plan of test pits 20, 21 and structure 24, section of test pit 20

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