Church of St Nicholas
Rotherfield Greys
Henley-on-Thames
Oxfordshire



Archaeological Evaluation and Survey



Rotherfield Greys Parochial Church Council

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# Church of St Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND SURVEY

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#### **SUMMARY**

In December 2001 and May 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a range of survey work at the Church of St Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys near Henley-on-Thames, Oxon (NGR SU 7270 8240) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council. A new building extension is proposed in the graveyard south of the church, and the survey was commissioned to investigate the archaeological impact of the proposed building on the historic fabric of the church and its grounds.

The wall survey revealed that the west wall of the church was entirely of small to medium flintwork in a consistently irregular pattern, of 19th-century date, with a clear building line marking the change of build where the church was extended in 1865. The survey of the graveyard provided a digital plot of the layout of the churchyard to the south of the church.

The three trial trenches contained evidence for graves and/or human remains. Burials in two of the trenches were undated, while coffin fittings from a grave fill in the third trench suggests that the graves here are of late 18th/early 19th century date but possibly later. A long mound on the south side of the church is interpreted as a raised area of the graveyard, possibly truncated and levelled when the church was extended to the west.

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In December 2001 and May 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a range of survey work at the Church of St Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys near Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council (hereafter PCC).
- 1.1.2 The work, which comprised a survey of the wall on the south side of the nave, a graveyard survey and trial trenching, was carried out in advance of a proposed extension on the south side of the church (Planning Reference: P01/SO547). The new structure will extend from the south wall of the nave across the gravel path and over the site of a pronounced east-west aligned mound that was of uncertain function prior to the evaluation.
- 1.1.3 A Written Scheme of Investigation providing a detailed specification of work was agreed with Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer, prior to work commencing (OA 2002). Julian Munby, the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, carried out some of the survey work and made early recommendations regarding the evaluation of the site.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on clays and gravels at c 95.7 m OD and is located at NGR SU 7270 8240. The graveyard is generally level with slight undulations in places. A pronounced mound is visible south of the church. The mound measures c 3 m across and is c 10 m long (OD level 95.99 m).

1.2.2 The top of the mound lies c 0.3 m above the general level of the rest of the graveyard (OD level 95.7 m). To the east end of the mound and overlying it is the site of a double gravestone monument, and further south, a slight linear hollow in the ground, which was thought before the evaluation to represent a former pathway within the graveyard.

### 1.3 Background

- 1.3.1 This church was almost entirely rebuilt in 1865 by W. Woodman, although an early 13th-century round-headed doorway remains in the north wall of the nave. The chancel contains a 13th century *aumbry* and a trefoil headed *piscina*. The north chapel dates to 1605 (the work of William Knollys, the first earl of Banbury). The font dates to *c* 1200, while the north porch has a small collection of medieval tiles. There are a number of monuments in the church; a brass to Lord Robert de Grey dates to 1387 and recumbent effigies of Sir Francis and lady Knollys date to 1596 (Sherwood and Pevsner, 1974, 734-5).
- 1.3.2 The churchyard was extended in May 1822 and then again in the years between 1908 and 1922 (Rotherfield Greys PCC 1981, 10) and evidence of this later work is visible in the west churchyard wall that exhibits changes of build. About halfway along its length, noticeably newer walling with fresher brickwork on the upper surface is visible.
- 1.3.3 That the church has been extended to the west is indicated by the old views of the church before restoration, kept in the vestry. They show a smaller building, with the north door aligned on the churchyard gate, and a four-bay arrangement.

#### 1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Brian Hook, Architect for the new building for providing plans and elevation drawings and to Mr and Mrs Richard Ovey for information about the project.

#### 2 PROJECT AIMS

- 2.1.1 To elucidate the date of the area of wall on the south side of the church where a new door linking to the extension is proposed (Wall Survey, section 3).
- 2.1.2 To survey the graveyard in the area of the new extension (Graveyard Survey, section 4)
- 2.1.3 To determine the character and survival of any archaeological remains (either human or structural) on the south side of the present church, in order to inform on the proposed extension building works (Trial Trenches, section 5).

### 3 BUILDING SURVEY BY JULIAN MUNBY

### 3.1 Building arrangement

- 3.1.1 The arrangement of the roof seems to reflect the rebuilding. There is a five-bay roof, with three wider bays towards the east, one narrow one by the nave door, and one broad at west end. The narrow bay is presumably the location of the former belfry (truss 4 is larger and was perhaps in the west wall).
- 3.1.2 The roof itself is of queen-post construction on tie-beams, with an upright 'arcade plate' type of purlin running between the queen posts, and braces from post to plate and post to collar. It is probably of 16th-century date, and has large medieval style marks on the northern rafters. There is no doubt that the west bay also includes medieval or early modern timber (including the wall plates), but some of this shows evident signs of reuse, and the other evidence is more compelling in the church having been extended.
- 3.1.3 The relationship between the bays of the earlier and modern church plan would be as follows:

Pre-Restoration	Post-Restoration	South wall	Roof	
[Chancel]	[Chancel]	[Chancel]		
Norman door	Norman door	Window; low side window	9 medieval rafters	
Window	Window	Window	6 medieval rafters	
North door	Window	Window	6 medieval rafters	
Window (belfry above)	North door and porch	Blank [proposed new door]	5 medieval rafters	
	Window (belfry above)	Window	Wide bay (re- used rafters)	
[West end]	[West end]	[West end]		

#### 3.2 Internal Wall Finish

- 3.2.1 The internal walls of the nave are plastered with an even textured finish aligned on the 19th-century windows, and none of it looks irregular or ancient.
- 3.2.2 The wall top on the north (i.e. below the base-triangle of the roof) is plastered towards the west end, and is then exposed rubble top from a point about the east side of the north door; the wall top on the south side is all plastered.

### 3.3 External wall finish

- 3.3.1 North Side: the nave has irregular flint rubble east of the porch, and somewhat more neatly laid rubble to the west. The Knollys Chapel is rendered.
- 3.3.2 East End: there is irregular flint rubble either side of the window, which is set in a large patch of neat flintwork with putlog (scaffold) holes formed of stone blocks. The vestry is brickwork.
- 3.3.3 South Side: the south wall is rendered at the east end for half the length of the nave, then there is flint rubble to the west end. The blank bay in which the new door is proposed (see Table above) has two distinct areas of flintwork.

- 3.3.4 In the eastern part (as far as the 19th-century window) there is flintwork of smaller and irregular character, with pink/brown mortar below the surface, and a marked band of coursed flints (at a height of about 2 m). There is no especial sign of the Victorian window being fitted into this by removing flintwork, but there is no reason to suppose that the wall itself is 19th century, and it is probably medieval in date.
- 3.3.5 An irregular line (some 1.3 m east of the buttress, Fig. 2) marks the change to a different type of flintwork in the west part; it is approximately vertical for almost 3 m and then turns to the east in a curving line and is then vertical again to the top of the wall.
- 3.3.6 To the west of the line the wall is slightly offset outwards, and there are larger random flints from here to the buttress (and beyond to the west end); they are all set in a whiter and harder mortar, which a small area of investigation showed had no pinky mortar beneath.
- 3.3.7 West end: The west wall is entirely of small to medium flintwork in a consistently irregular pattern. It is all of 19th-century date.

#### 3.4 Conclusion

3.4.1 The survey was undertaken prior to the proposed cutting of a new door in the south wall. The examination was non-intrusive, based on observation of the church walls inside and out. It was concluded that a new door <u>could</u> be made in walling that appeared to be of 19th-century date

#### 4 GRAVEYARD SURVEY

### 4.1 Methodology

- 4.1.1 A plan was compiled of the extant graves/gravestones south of the church (Fig. 3), and included possible earthwork sites here. Particular attention was paid to the location of gravestones in the immediate vicinity of the proposed extension.
- 4.1.2 The survey was conducted using a Total Station Theodolite (TST) and was related to an Ordnance Survey grid. The site plan was prepared using a combination of analogue and digital planning.
- 4.1.3 All plan reference points were surveyed using the TST and all the data were logged initially in the TST and then downloaded onto a computer at OA; in addition a manual file of all key points was maintained in case of errors with the TST. All digital data has been fully backed up in the field and copies are stored centrally at OA.

#### 4.2 Results

4.2.1 The plan shows the layout of the gravestones and memorials south of the church and has provided a digitised plan of the extant earthwork there.

#### 5 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY: TRIAL TRENCHES

#### 5.1 Scope of fieldwork

5.1.1 The evaluation consisted of three trenches (Fig. 4). Two measured 2 m by 2 m and a third measured 6 m by 1.5 m. The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a Kubota mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.

### 5.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 5.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were cleaned to determine their extent and nature. All archaeological features were planned and the trench sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features and trenches were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).
- 5.2.2 Upon completion of the fieldwork, Trenches 2 and 3 were backfilled. Trench 1 was left open for further inspection at the request of the PCC.
- 6 EVALUATION RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS
- 6.1 Description of deposits

#### 6.2 Trench 1

- 6.2.1 The earliest deposit exposed at the base of the trench (Fig. 5) was the natural, consisting of silty clay (103), the upper surface of which lay at 95.12 m OD and 0.6 m below the present ground level. This was overlain by a sandy gravel (107), which was exposed at the northern edge of the trench, also thought to be a natural layer, though not enough of this deposit was seen to be certain. A layer of general cemetery soil (102) was present on top of the natural. A layer of re-deposited natural (104) consisting of a mixed sand, gravel and loam was exposed in the south end of the trench.
- 6.2.2 The natural and re-deposited natural layers were cut by an east-west aligned grave (105) containing a dark brown sandy loam with inclusions of gravel and tile fragments (106). The feature was 1 m wide and extended beyond the limits of the trench. The sides of the grave tapered slightly inwards (Fig. 5, section). The grave was sealed beneath a 0.6 m thick layer of churchyard soil (101). Numerous disarticulated fragments of human bone were present in layer 101, which extended throughout the trench. Overlaying 101 was a 0.12 m thick deposit of dark brown sandy loam topsoil and turf (100).

### 6.3 Trench 2

6.3.1 Re-deposited natural (201) consisting of mixed orange-brown sand, gravel and loam was present in the centre of the trench (Fig. 6). Two north-west/south-east aligned graves (202 and 204) cut through the re-deposited natural and both extended beyond the limits of the trench.

6.3.2 The graves contained dark brown sandy loam fills (203 and 205) with gravel and tile inclusions together with fragments of dis-articulated human and a few small animal bones. Articulated human bones from an adult individual were present in the northern grave (202). These human remains were present 0.6 m below the ground surface at 95.24 m OD. The graves and the re-deposited natural were sealed by a 0.14 m thick deposit of topsoil and turf (200.

#### 6.4 Trench 3

- 6.4.1 Re-deposited natural mixed with cemetery soil (301) of the same composition and colour as (201) was exposed in the south-west part of the trench (Fig. 7). The layer also contained flints and tile fragments as well as dis-articulated human bones from at least three individuals.
- 6.4.2 Cut into layer 301 in the west end of the trench were three east-west aligned features, 302 filled by 303, 304 filled by 305 and 306 filled by 307. These features were graves and were very closely spaced. Each contained a similar dark brown sandy loam with flints and chalk pieces.
- 6.4.3 Along the north edge of the trench was a further grave (313) filled by 314. The feature cut the fill of grave 306 and was aligned east-west. A human cranium was present in the west end of the feature. This is likely to have been a re-deposited disarticulated bone, as no articulating mandible or cervical vertebral segments were found in association with the cranium. These remains lay 0.4 m below ground level. Wood fragments, two coffin nails, one metal stud, fragments of a corroded coffin grip plate and two further coffin grips were recovered from the fill (314). The grips date to the late 18th/early 19th century (see finds section below).
- 6.4.4 The east part of the trench contained of a series of inter-cutting graves (Group No. 315) whose edges were impossible to discern. The feature(s) contained a very mixed dark brown sandy loam that included flint and tile fragments (316). Bones from at least one truncated neonate were visible in this deposit. A stone slab, possibly a grave marker, was present in the upper part of this layer in the north-east corner of the trench (at 95.16 m OD, 0.15 m below ground level). The slab was 0.12 m thick and extended beyond the limits of the trench.
- 6.4.5 To the middle of the trench a sub-rectangular grave was present. It was orientated WNW/ESE and contained dark brown sandy loam (309) and the skeleton of an infant (310). The edges of the grave were only visible along the south and west sides as it had been truncated to the east. The grave contained the remains of an individual aged between 2 and 3 years at death. The infant burial was located at 95.35 m OD, 0.38 m below present ground level.
- 6.4.6 At the south-east corner of the trench, a sub-rectangular grave (311) was cut in to layer 316. The grave was orientated north-west-south-east and extended beyond the edges of the trench. It was filled with dark brown sandy loam (312) with flints and fragments of tile. A 0.1 m thick layer of topsoil and turf (300) sealed all of these graves and the cemetery soil.

#### 7 FINDS

- 7.1.1 All human bones recovered in the course of the evaluation were re-interred in the trenches prior to back-filling. 19th century tiles and other clearly modern finds were not retained.
- 7.1.2 The coffin grips from Trench 3 have been identified as Spitalfields Type 2a that is a design dated to between 1763-1837 (Reeve and Adams 1993, 140). It is possible that this type of coffin fitting remained in use in the provinces after it ceased being produced in London, so it should not be used as an absolute dating tool for the burial from which it was associated.

#### 8 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 8.1.1 The wall survey was undertaken by Julian Munby of OA, who concluded that the church was extended westwards in the 19th century by the addition of a bay, and by moving the bell turret from its narrow bay to a new western bay, which was constructed with new flint walling and a collection of old but re-used timbers. In the bay of the south wall where the new door is proposed there is some older walling, and a substantial area of 19th-century flintwork (adjacent to the buttress). The conclusion was that a new door could be made with minimal impact on what appears to be medieval fabric.
- 8.1.2 Trench 1 was located across the line of a shallow hollow running east-west, where the south end of the proposed extension will be. Though the hollow may have been a pathway, no evidence for this was found in the trench sides. It is equally likely that it was the site of the former churchyard wall after its removal either in 1822 or at some time between 1908-12. A change of build with newer brickwork on the upper surface is visible in the west boundary wall of the churchyard, in line with this hollow. The older walling is in the style of the west extension to the church with flint galletting and the rebuild is constructed in similar style, so the later date is likely for the creation of this hollow after removal of the south boundary wall and extension of the graveyard. A single grave was present within the trench sealed beneath a thick layer of general churchyard soil the grave is undated.
- 8.1.3 Trench 2 was situated across the south-east aspect of the mound. Two graves were located within the trench, with the northerly of the two containing an articulated skeleton. The shallow nature of this grave could suggest an interment date before the Health and Safety Act of 1856, which stipulated that graves had to be 6 feet deep.
- 8.1.4 Trench 3 contained six distinguishable graves, closely dug with some inter-cutting. The soil at the east end of the trench was mixed, with many dis-articulated bones, indicating this part of the cemetery has been heavily used. The date obtained from the coffin grips could suggest that the grave from which they were recovered was dug between 1763 and 1837. However, the style of the grips is likely to have stayed in production for longer than this outside metropolitan London, so the grave could therefore have been excavated later than 1837.
- 8.1.5 The mound appears to have been created as a result of the build up of soil over centuries of interments in the graveyard. It appears to be confined within the original

boundary of the cemetery on the south side. It is possible that the mound once extended across the west side of the church, before the building was extended in 1865. If this were the case, then during construction of the extension the mound would have been levelled to lower the ground, probably for drainage, leaving the pronounced ridge and mound that survives today.

8.1.6 The skeletal remains and grave cuts in Trench 3 are likely to be of 18th or 19th century date, with general dating being provided by the coffin fittings. Owing to the presence of human remains at these relatively high levels below the surface of the churchyard, however, it was not possible to excavate deep enough to establish whether there are medieval burials below these. Graves in Trenches 1 and 2 remain undated.

### APPENDICES

### 9 APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	Ctxt No	Туре	Width (m)	Thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No./ wt	Date
001						9		
	100	Layer		0.12	Turf and topsoil			
	101	Layer		0.6	Cemetery soil			
	102	Layer		0.12	Cemetery soil			
	103	Layer			Natural			
	104	Layer			Re-deposited natural			
	105	Cut	1.10		Grave			
	106	Fill	1.10		Fill of grave			
	107	Layer			Natural			
002								
	200	Layer	0.12		Turf and topsoil			
	201	Layer	0.42		Re-deposited natural			
	202	Cut			Grave			
	203	Fill			Fill of 203			
	204	Cut			Grave			
	205	Fill			Fill of 204			
003								
	300	Layer	0.10		Turf and topsoil			
	301	Layer			Re-deposited natural			
	302	Cut			Grave			
	303	Fill			Fill of 302			
	304	Cut			Grave			
	305	Fill			Fill of 304			
	306	Cut			Grave			
	307	Fill			Fill of 306			
	308	Cut			Grave			
	309	Fill			Fill of 308			
	310	Skeleto n			Fill of 308			
	311	Cut		,	Grave			
	312	Fill			Fill of 311			
	313	Cut			Grave			

314	Fill	Fill of 313	coffin fittings	Late18th/e19th century
315	Cut	Inter-cutting graves		
316	Fill	Fill of 315		

#### APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Sherwood, J and Pevsner, N, 1974 Buildings of Oxfordshire, Penguin.

Reeve, J, and Adams, M, 1993 *The Spitalfields Project, Volume 1; The archaeology. Across the Styx,.* CBA Research Report **85**.

Rotherfield Greys PCC, 1981 Saint Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys. Church Guidebook. W H Houldershaw Ltd.

#### APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St. Nicholas Church, Rotherfield Greys, Henley, Oxfordshire

Site code: RGSN 02

Grid reference: SU 7270 8240

Type of evaluation: Wall survey, graveyard survey, trial trenches x 3

Date and duration of project: December 2001 (wall survey 1 day) and May 2002

(Evaluation trenches, 2.5 days)

Area of site: 9 m x 6 m

Summary of results: A survey of the south wall of the Nave revealed a clear line marking the change of build for the Victorian extension. The survey of the graveyard provided a digital plot of the layout of the churchyard to the south of the church. The trial trenches revealed the presence of graves and/or human remains in all three trenches. Burials in two trenches were undated, while coffin fittings from a grave fill in the third trench suggests that the graves here are of late 18th/early 19th century date but possibly later. A long mound on the south side of the church is interpreted as a raised area of the graveyard, possibly truncated and levelled when the church was extended to the west in 1865

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.

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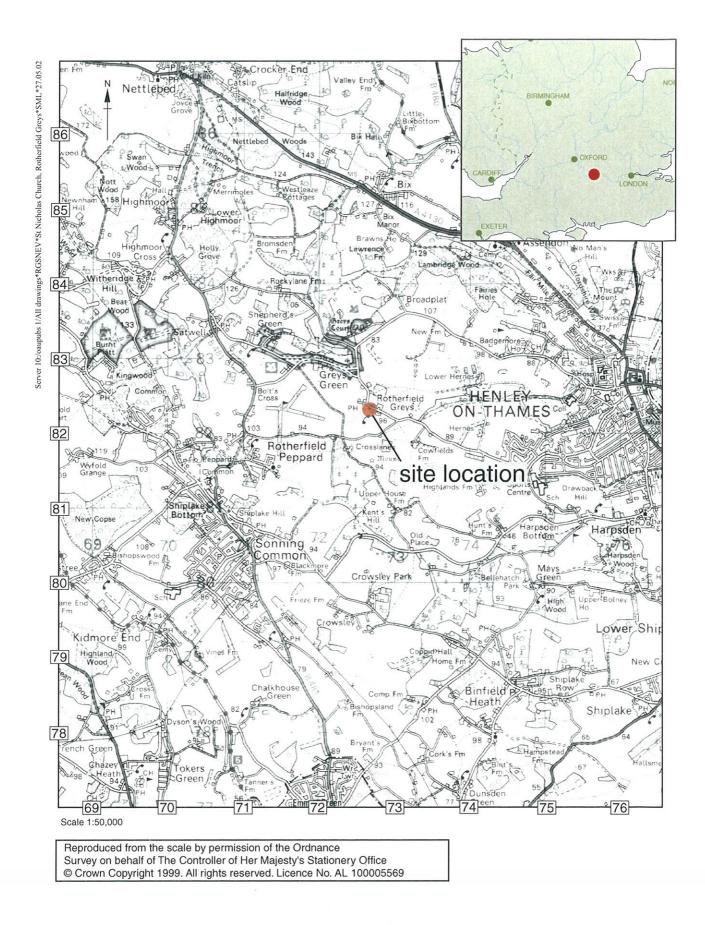


Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Elevation of south side of Nave to show change of build line.

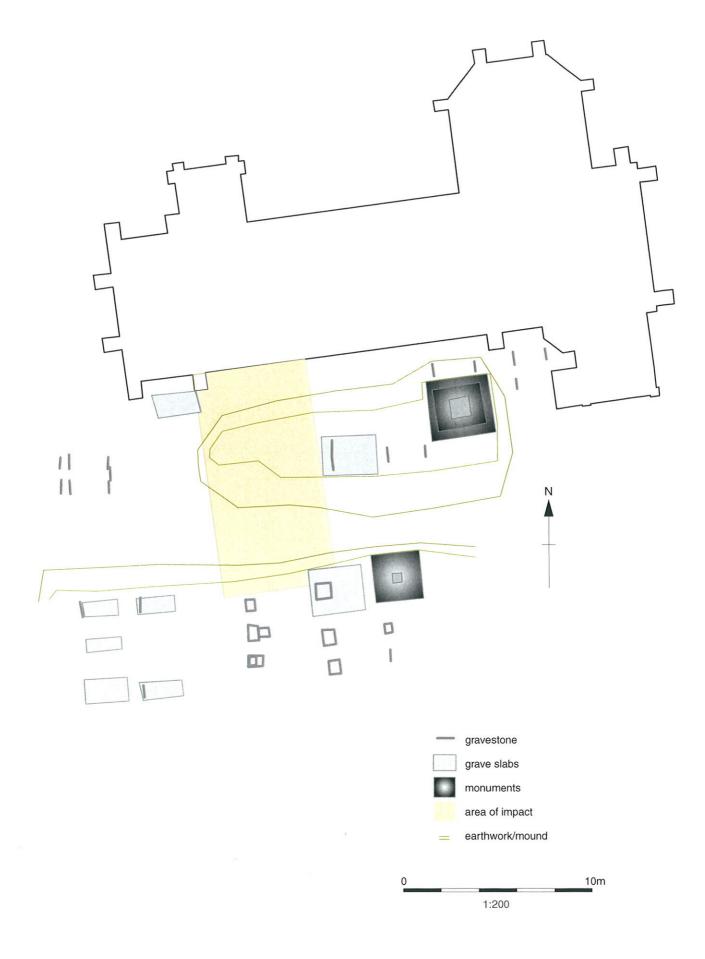


Figure 3: Survey of the church in the area of the new building.

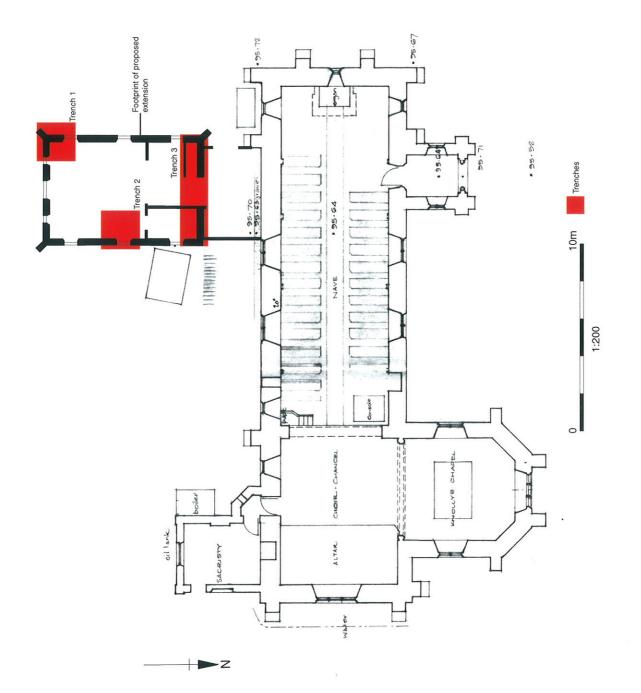
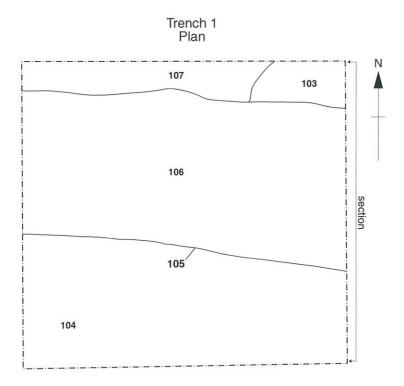


Figure 4: Ground plan of church showing trench location.



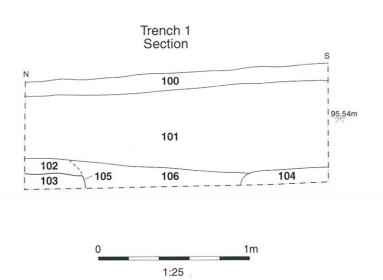
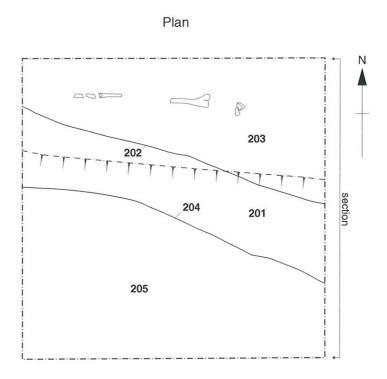


Figure 5: Trench 1, plan and section.



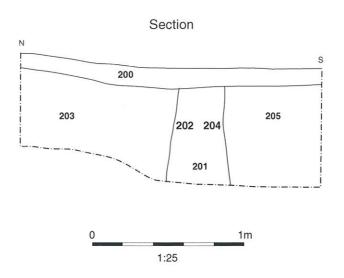


Figure 6: Trench 2, plan and section.

Plan

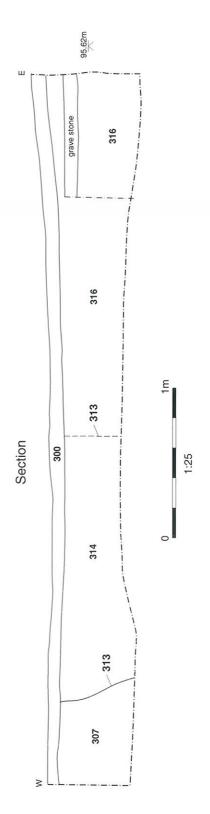


Figure 7: Trench 3, plan and section.



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