

St.MARY'S CHURCH, EWELME, OXON. ESMC93.

SU689928.

INTRODUCTION

In July and August 1993 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St. Mary's Church, Ewelme, Oxon, during the excavation of a drainage trench alongside the N wall.

The present church was built c.1432 by William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, in a style typical of East Anglian churches of that time. It incorporated the 14th century tower of an earlier church, dedicated to All Saints, of which nothing of its size or plan is known.

The site was visited on occasion during the excavation, and the trench recorded and photographed as necessary.

RESULTS (Figs. 1 and 2.)

The trench against the N wall was a uniform 1.30 m wide, and varied in depth from 2.2 m at the E end to approximately 1.0 m to the W of the N. Porch. In places the brick lining of the Victorian drain (4) was removed completely, revealing the rough limestone slab foundations of the N wall (7). The foundations extended down to the surface of the natural chalk subsoil, which varied from 1.1 to 1.2 m below present ground level. Incorporated into the courses of limestone were occasional fragments of ashlar blocks.

Where the trench passed the buttresses, baulks were left in place. In one baulk (Section 1), the Victorian drain, (3) could be seen cutting a grave (2) to the N. Under the buttress (6) could be seen another grave (5), which appeared to be either cut by the N wall foundation, or immediately adjacent to it. Revealed in the dark brown fill of the grave were the truncated leg bones of a burial.

Along the S facing section of the entire trench evidence of numerous intercutting graves was noted, the deeper ones cut down into the top of the natural chalk. The depth and unsafe nature of the trench precluded any intrusive investigation of the deposits. No secure dating evidence was recovered from any grave.

Similar evidence of intensive burials was noted in the narrow trench dug from the corner of the N porch to the W churchyard wall.

## INTERPRETATION

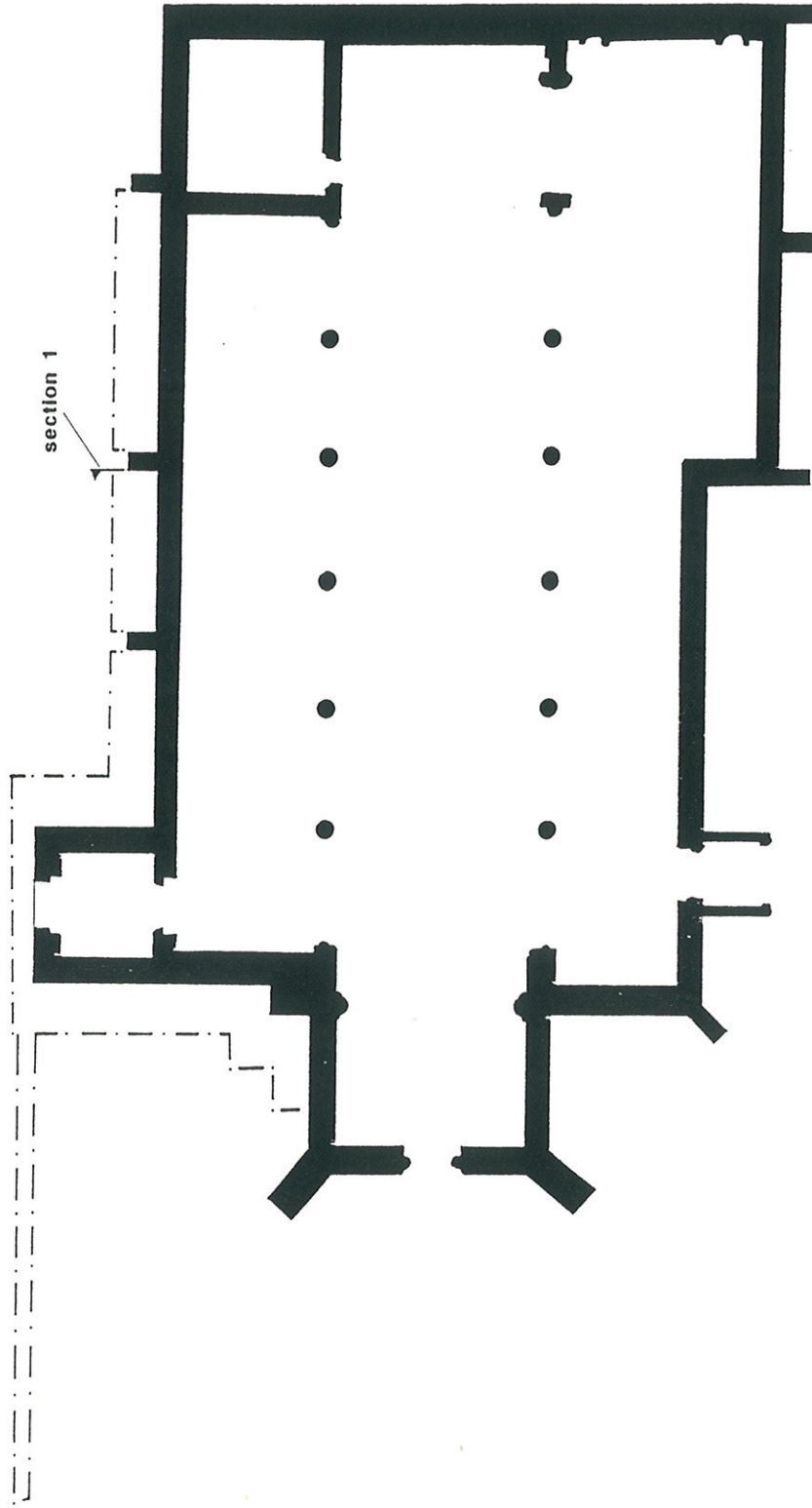
The presence of ashlar fragments in the foundations of the present church suggest that some of the masonry from the old church was re-used.

It is not known whether the buttress (6) is an original feature of the building. However, the fact that the grave (5) is so close to the wall, if not actually cut by it, suggests that the grave relates to an earlier building whose N wall is further to the S.

It was not uncommon for the somewhat narrow aisles of Norman churches to be widened. At nearby Garsington it was recently shown that the narrow N aisle was widened in the 13th or 14th century.

Although the results of the watching brief are not conclusive, they do suggest that the earlier church, whether it had a N aisle or not, was a narrower building than that of 1432.

Alan Hardy  
OAU  
Nov. 1993.



--- limit of excavation



scale 1:200

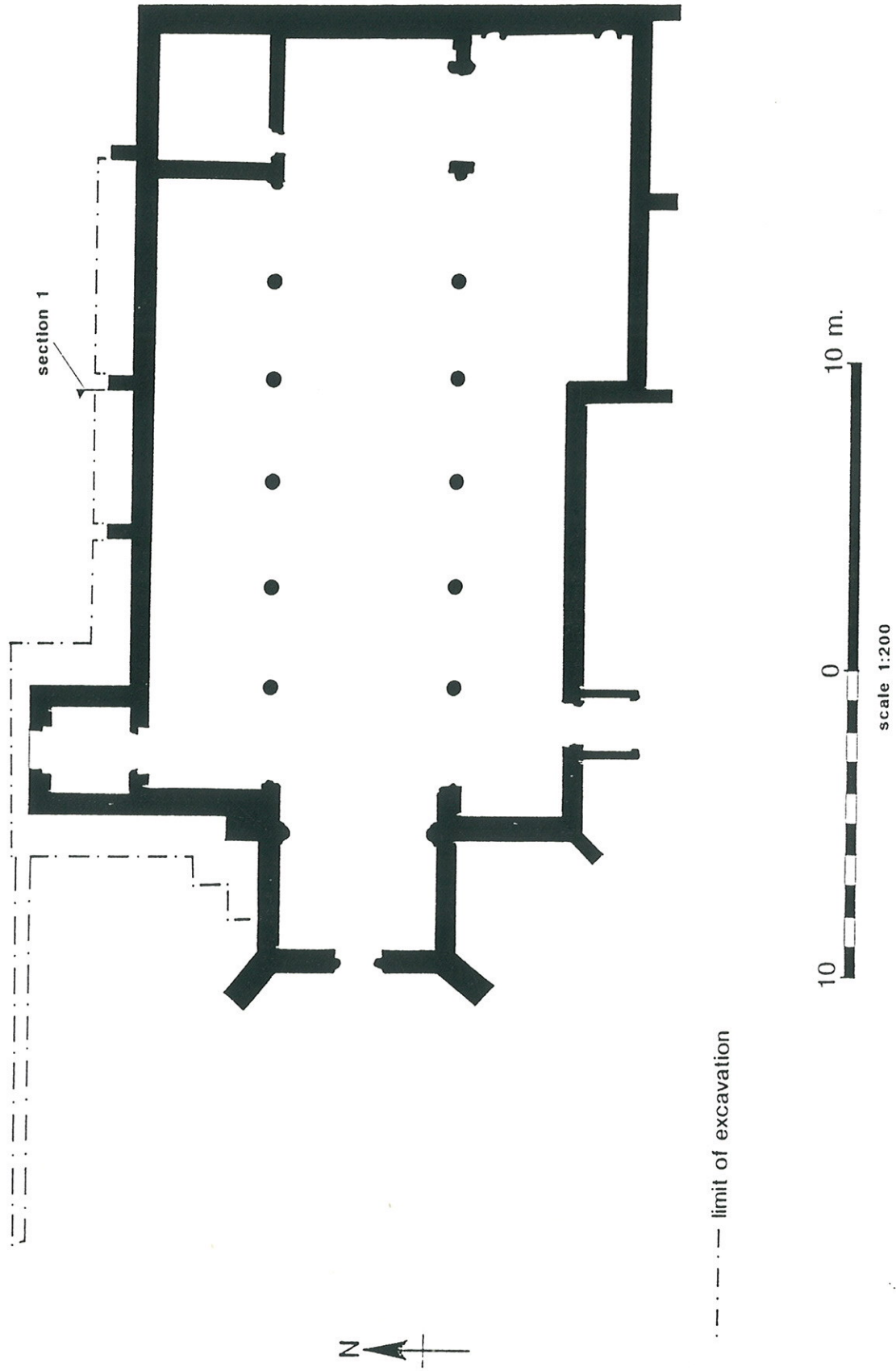


figure 1



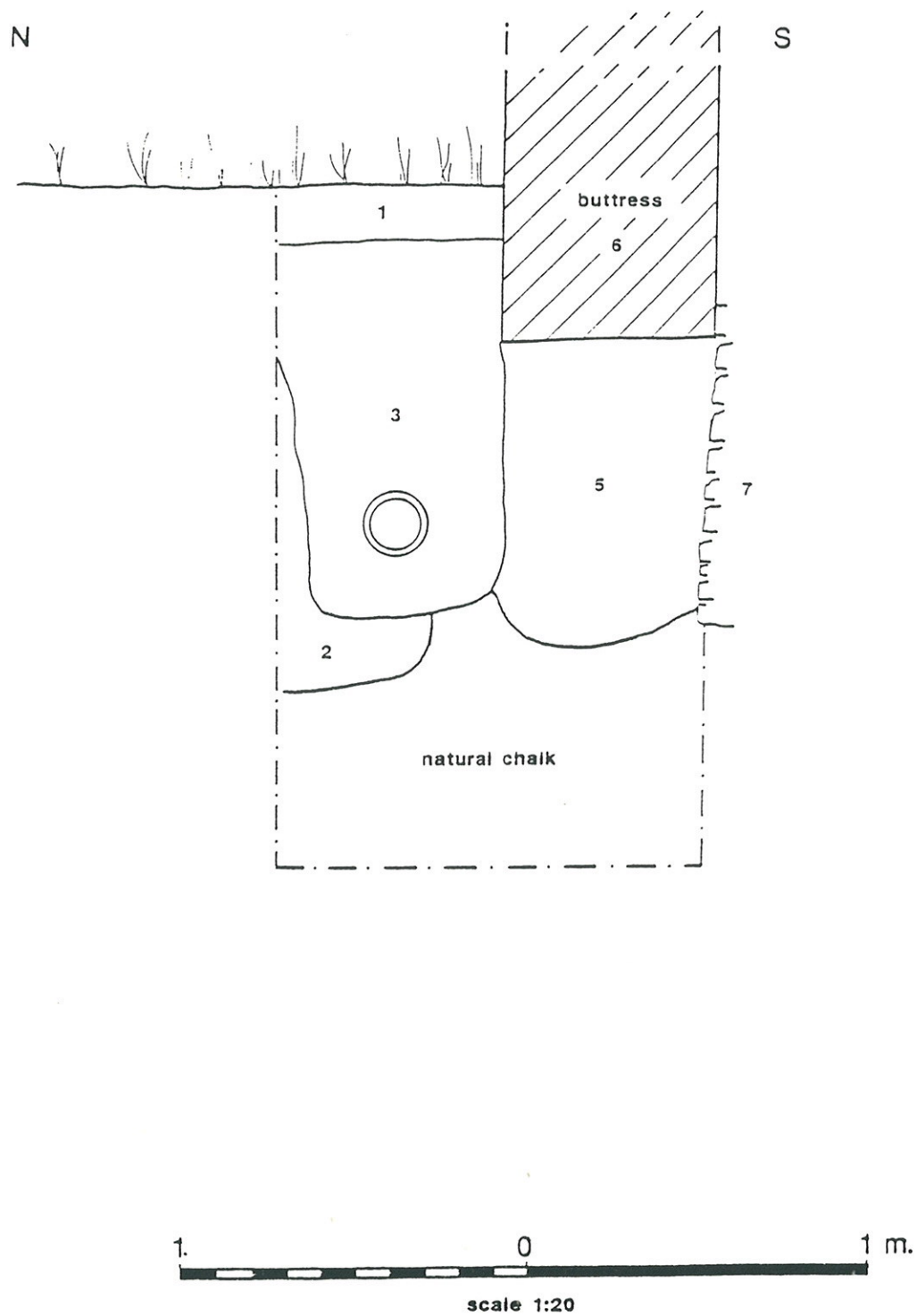


figure 2

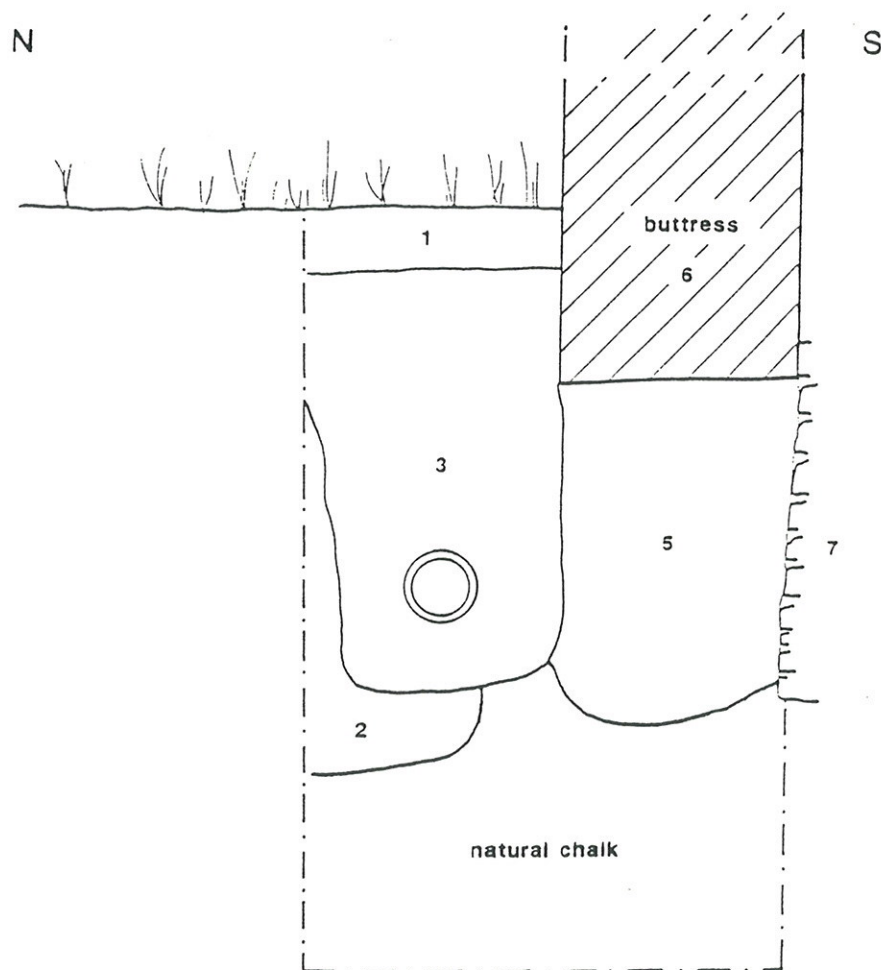


figure 2