



St Mary's Church, Lyford, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

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St Mary's Church, Lyford, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Robert McIntosh

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Andrew Townsend Architects on behalf of Lyford PCC to undertake an archaeological watching brief during drainage works at St Mary's Church, Lyford, Oxfordshire.

The drainage works comprised the digging of a drainage trench around the outside of the north, west and south sides of the nave of the church, a trial pit just outside the churchyard and a trench running from the south-west corner of the nave to a soakaway located just outside the churchyard.

All of the drainage excavations were undertaken entirely within the limits of previous drainage trenches and did not impact upon or expose any undisturbed deposits. The drainage trench excavated around the nave exposed the upper part of the footings of the nave but no other archaeological remains were encountered.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Annie Page of Andrew Townsend Architects who commissioned the watching brief on behalf of Lyford PCC. Thanks are also extended to Julian Munby, the Diocesan archaeological Advisor, who monitored the work, for his advice and guidance. The drainage works were carried out by Andy Jones of AD Jones Roofing, and OA would like to thank him for his co-operation throughout.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Tim Allen. The watching brief fieldwork was carried out by Mark Dodd, Robin Bashford and Robert McIntosh. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Ben Brown. Thanks are also extended to the OA staff who prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Andrew Townsend Architects on behalf of Lyford PCC to undertake an archaeological watching brief during drainage works at St Mary's Church, Lyford, Oxfordshire.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of a Faculty granted by the diocese. A brief was set by Andrew Townsend Architects in consultation with the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA and approved in March 2017. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements of the brief.

1.1.3 All work was carried out in accordance with the Standards and guidance for archaeological excavation and archiving (ClfA 2014a; ClfA 2014b).

1.1.4 The archaeological watching brief was carried out between March and June 2017.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lay at the end of The Green, Lyford, which is a hamlet situated between Wantage and the A420, just east of Charney Bassett. The church is 150m east of the River Ock.

1.2.2 The area of work comprised the churchyard and the edge of an adjacent field just beyond the churchyard's southern boundary. The churchyard is elevated above the level of the surrounding ground due to repeated burials (Plate 1).

1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Ampthill Clay and Kimmeridge Clay Formation – Mudstone (Geology of Britain Viewer 2017). An alluvial channel runs east-west just north of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 St Mary's church comprises a nave with clerestory, chancel and north porch. A timber-framed bellcote rises from within the line of the west end of the nave (Plate 1). The building dates from the early 13th century and much of the original church remains today, although the bell tower and clerestory were added in the 15th or possibly the early 16th century. Extensive renovation was carried out in 19th century, when the north porch was added, incorporating a 15th century oak arch-headed doorway.

1.3.2 The walls of the church are constructed using local limestone rubblework with finer quality dressed limestone to window surrounds, quoins, etc. Walls are finished with plaster to the building interior. Roofs to the chancel and north porch are relatively steeply pitched with clay tile coverings while the nave is of shallow pitch with lead sheet coverings. The timber-framed bell tower projects through the west end of the nave roof and is clad in timber boarding to the sides with a pyramidal welsh slate covered roof. The church sits in the centre of its churchyard with residential or agricultural land beyond.

1.3.3 The church is listed Grade II*.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 General

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains;
- ii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other remains;
- iii. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.;
- iv. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy;
- v. To assess the association and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape;
- vi. To determine the potential for the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive;
- vii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity;
- viii. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Specific Aims and Objectives

2.2.1 Specific aims and objectives were:

- i. To record any church fabric exposed by the works, and in particular to note any buried structural remains not also represented by surviving remains above ground;
- ii. In the churchyard, record the presence of any articulated human remains;
- iii. To record any archaeological features or deposits in the churchyard that may relate to its earlier ecclesiastical use;
- iv. To recover any finds and to record any archaeological features or deposits that may predate the church and cemetery;

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The removal of existing drainage was carried out by hand by the building contractor under close archaeological supervision.

2.3.2 Spoil was monitored for finds both visually and using a metal detector.

2.3.3 Exposed building fabric below ground was carefully and thoroughly cleaned, planned in relation to the standing building and photographed in detail.

2.3.4 No undisturbed archaeological deposits were encountered. The fills of the previous drainage trenches were monitored for finds, and their sections inspected for evidence of earlier stratigraphy, human remains or other finds. Several pieces of recent pottery were observed but were not recovered.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented in the three phases in which the work was carried out, comprising the trench excavated around the western end of the Nave, the trial pit excavated just outside the south-western boundary of churchyard, and finally the trench and soakaway running through the southern part of the churchyard and extending just beyond its southern limit (Figs 2 and 3).

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 All of the deposits that were observed were the fills of recent drainage trenches and were similar to the modern topsoil. No natural geology or subsoil were revealed in any of the excavations.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the trenches remained dry throughout.

3.3 Trench around the north, south and west sides of the nave (Fig. 3; Plates 2 to 8)

3.3.1 The trench was excavated around the entire western end of the Nave and was excavated through the backfill of an existing trench, possibly for a storm drain. Fragments of banded pearlware of mid-19th century manufacture were found, suggesting that the earlier drain was of 19th century date.

3.3.2 The trench was excavated for 7m along the south side, 6.5m along the north side and for the full length of the west end. Along the north side it was on average 0.75m wide (Plates 7 and 8), on the west side it was up to 0.85m wide (Plates 4 and 5) and on the south side it averaged 0.5m in width (Plates 2 and 3), and on the trench was 0.6m deep on all sides.

3.3.3 The upper part of the footings of the nave were exposed on all three sides, offset from the face of the wall by 0.6m on the north side, 0.5m on the west side and 0.2m on the south. The footings at the north-west corner of the Nave were predominantly constructed of large limestone blocks (Plate 6), but the blocks used in all other parts of the exposed footing were generally smaller (Plates 3 and 8), although occasional larger blocks were also seen. The stones were only roughly shaped, and were laid in rough courses without mortar bonding. The foundations were not bottomed but five courses were observed on all sides, and the top of a sixth course was seen in places. Detailed photos, which can be linked to a plan, were taken of the entire exposed footings, and are available in the site archive.

3.4 Trial pit (Fig. 2; Plate 9)

3.4.1 The trial pit was located directly outside the southern boundary of the churchyard, 4m east of its south-western corner. The trial pit was excavated by hand to locate the position of an existing drain and measured 1.1m x 0.3m. The trial pit was excavated to a depth of 0.6m and only revealed deposits of recent date similar to the topsoil. Although no drain was found, this indicated that the area had been disturbed.

3.5 Trench south of the church and soakaway (Fig. 2; Plates 10-12)

3.5.1 The trench (Plates 10 and 11) ran from the south-west corner of the nave for 12m until it crossed the boundary of the churchyard. It led into a soakaway (Plate 12) located just beyond the boundary, which measured at least 3m x 1.5 in plan.

3.5.2 The trench had an average width of 0.5m and was excavated to a depth of 1-1.2m. The soakaway was dug to a maximum depth of 1.2m. Only topsoil and backfill were revealed in these excavations, as the trench was dug following an existing drainage trench (the drainage pipe searched for in the trial pit). The soakaway also revealed identical backfill layers. No natural geology, grave cuts or finds other than those of very recent date were observed.

3.6 Finds summary

3.6.1 Three fragments of a tankard of banded pearlware with mocha decoration, manufactured between 1820 and 1860, and a fragment of plan window glass, were noted in the fill of the former drainage trenches. No human remains were identified during the excavations. No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The excavation was carried out in dry weather and in good light conditions.

4.2 Objectives and results

4.2.1 The exposed parts of the footings of the nave were planned in relation to the standing building and were photographed in detail.

4.2.2 No archaeological deposits or human remains were exposed.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 Five courses of the footings of the nave were revealed on all three sides, offset slightly from the walls above. These consisted of roughly-shaped slabs of varying thickness laid in rough courses without mortar bonding, and were clearly not intended to be seen. They clearly did not belong to an earlier structure.

4.3.2 No stratigraphy relating to the churchyard and its burials or disturbed human remains were exposed within the drainage trench or the soakaway. Finds from the backfill indicated that the trench was excavated in the 19th century.

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 The foundations of the church are of local interest, but otherwise nothing of any significance was found.

APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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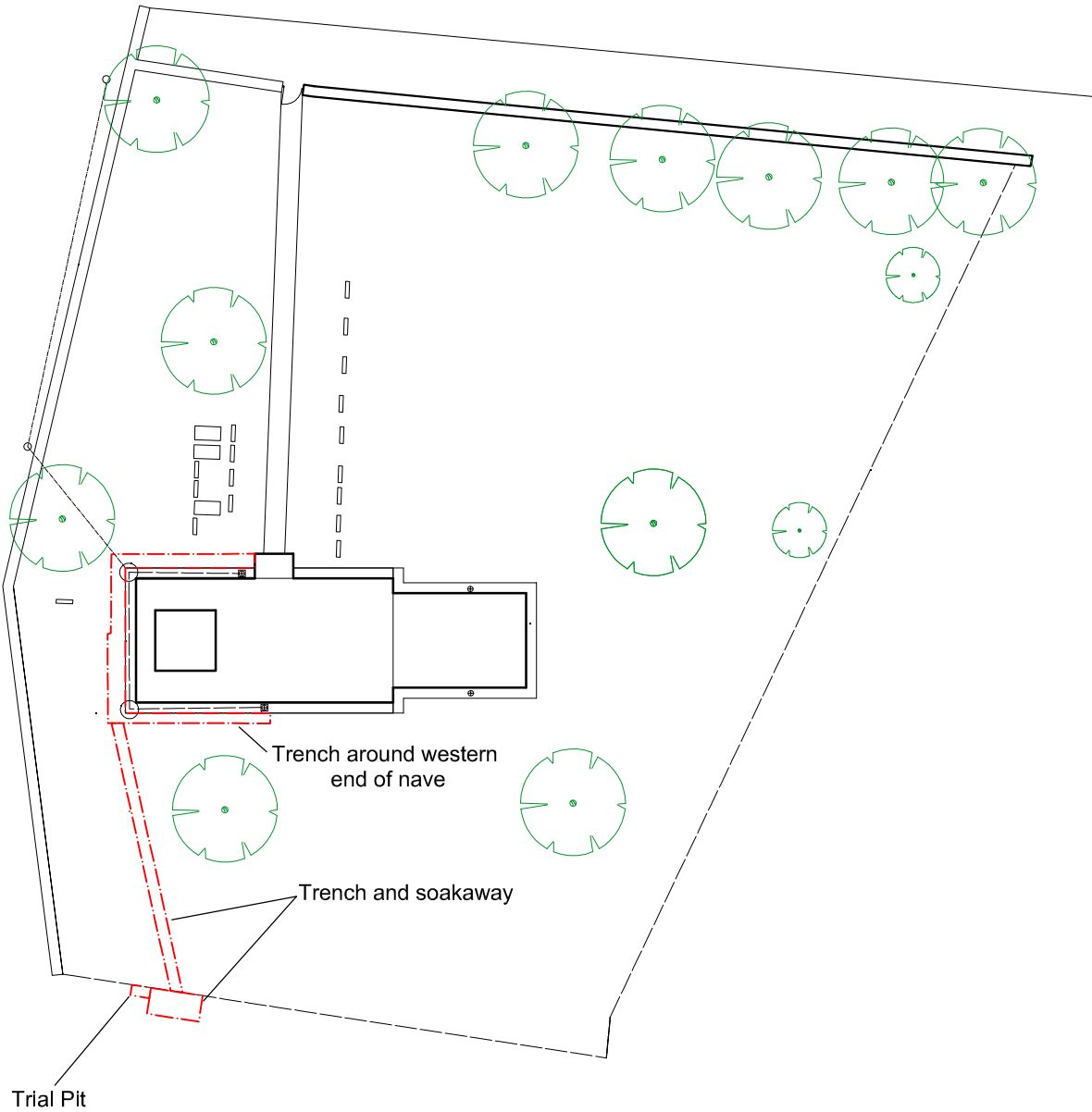
APPENDIX B**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	St Mary's Church, Lyford, Oxfordshire
Site code:	LYSMC 17
Grid Reference	SU 3900 9442
Type:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	10/3/2017-26/6/2017
Area of Site	25m ²
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OCMS: 2017:44
Summary of Results:	Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief during drainage works at St Mary's Church, Lyford, Oxfordshire.

The watching brief comprised monitoring a trial pit just outside the graveyard boundary, a drainage trench around the western end of the Nave and a drainage trench running across the churchyard to a soakaway located just outside the churchyard boundary. The drainage trench excavated around the Nave revealed the footings for the Nave, which was recorded by planning and detailed photography. No other archaeological remains were exposed.



Figure 1: Site location



0 20 m

Scale at A4 1:400

Figure 2: Site plan

- Outline of standing church
- Limit of excavation
- Vegetation

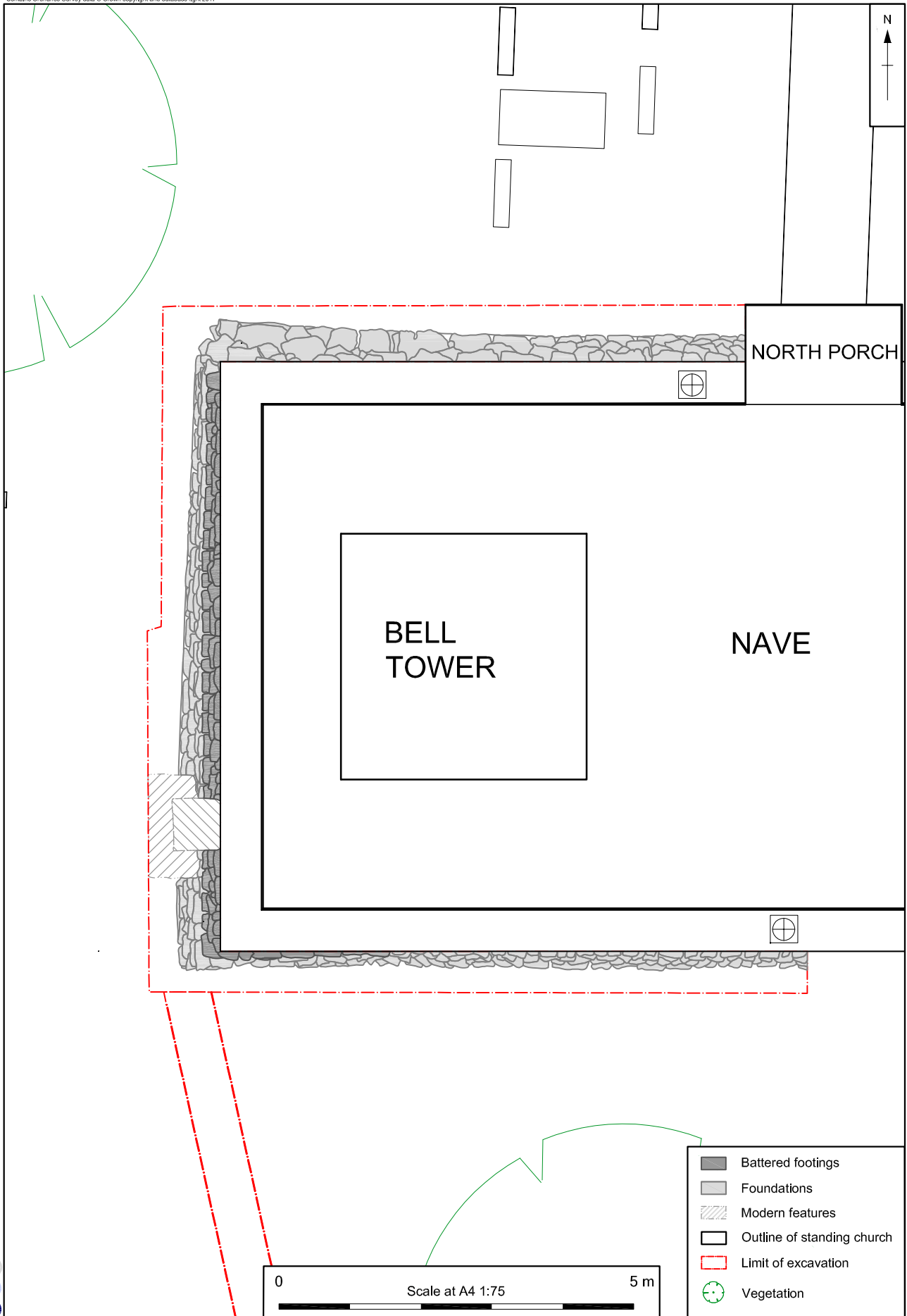


Figure 3: Footings of nave



Plate 1: St Marys Church - looking NE

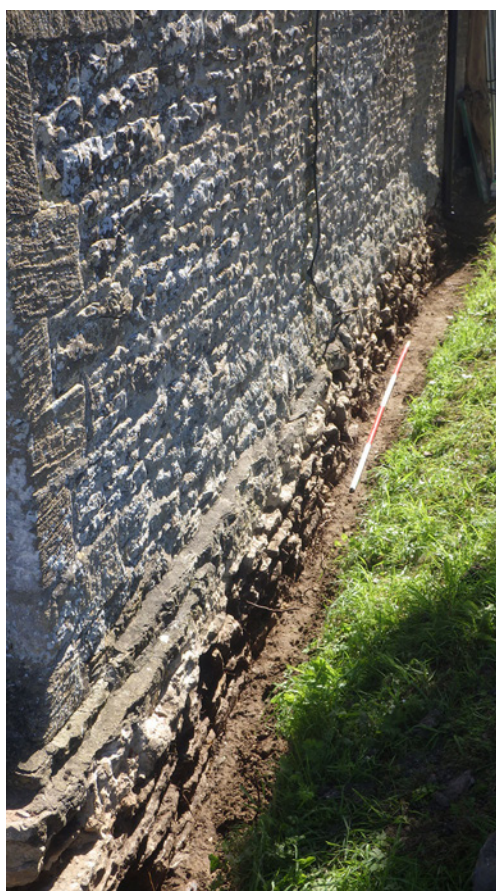


Plate 2: South Wall of Nave - looking
ENE



Plate 3: South Wall of Nave - looking N



Plate 4: Southwest corner of Nave – looking north-east along west wall



Plate 5: West Wall of Nave – looking
SSE



Plate 6: North-west corner of Nave – detail looking east



Plate 7: North Wall of Nave – looking south-west



Plate 8: North Wall of Nave – looking south



Plate 9: Trail Trench Post Excavation - looking NE



Plate 10: Drainage Trench South of Church - looking NE



Plate 11: Drainage Trench – looking NNW



Plate 12: Soakaway – looking north-west



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