

# Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at the Church of St. John the Baptist, Grimston, Leicestershire



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## Summary

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- Trent & Peak Archaeology was commissioned by Midlands Stonemasonry to carry out an archaeological watching brief during intrusive groundworks associated with drainage improvements at the church of St. John the Baptist, Grimston, Leicestershire.
- The church of St John the Baptist is a Grade II\* listed parish church situated within the village of Grimston. The Church dates broadly to the 13<sup>th</sup> century with later alterations. Little is known of the original 13<sup>th</sup> century footprint of the building, though it appears to have undergone a great deal of expansion and restoration in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Much of the church fabric is likely to belong to the 15<sup>th</sup> century phase of church development, with notable additions to the tower and belfry. The church is constructed of locally imported iron stone; the northern transept collapsed around c.1740, and was not rebuilt.
- The intrusive ground works comprised hand excavation of 3 trenches for drain runs and a single connected soakaway pit. The drain runs were between 44.0m and 5.0m in length, and approximately 0.40m wide and 0.20m deep. The soakaway measured 1.80m x 1.20m x 0.80 – 0.90m.
- A number of disarticulated human bones were recovered from the soakaway. These were collected and reburied at the site.
- The remains of a brick structure were uncovered during the excavation of the drain runs. This was directly abutting a modern drain that probably truncated the structure. The structure was likely to be post-medieval to modern in date and interpreted as either the remains of an earlier wall or structural feature, such as a brick buttress; or alternatively an earlier drain.

## Acknowledgements

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Thanks are extended to Midlands Stonemasonry for commissioning the work and to Richard Clark, Principal Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council, for supervising the work. The project was managed by Ed Taylor and undertaken in the field by Tristan Cousins.

Illustrations have been gratefully compiled by Marius Ilie.

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## 1 Introduction

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- 1.1 Trent & Peak Archaeology (TPA) was commissioned by Midlands Stonemasonry to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land at the Church of St. John the Baptist, Grimston, Leicestershire (centred at SK 68633 21892, Figure 1) during intrusive groundworks associated with drainage improvements.
- 1.2 The work was carried out in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012); *CiFA Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014b) and *CiFA Code of Conduct* (2014b). The project was conducted in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (Owen 2018).

## 2 Topography and Geology

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- 2.1.1 The Church of St. John is located centrally within the village of Grimston, in the Melton district of Leicestershire. It is bounded on all sides by residential development and arable land, which retains the character and footprint of the historic village core. The Church and village sit within the Grimston Conservation Area, designated in 1994. The Church sits at an elevation of approximately 139m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).
- 2.1.2 The sedimentary bedrock geology of the area consists of dark grey and bluish grey mudstone, of the Charmouth Mudstone Formation. The superficial deposit overlying this is the Oadby Member (lias-rich) – Diamicton, brown to grey clay or silty clay (British Geological Survey 2019).
- 2.1.3 The overlying soils are characterised as slightly acidic loamy and clayey soils, with impeded drainage ([www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes](http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes)).

## 3 Historical and Archaeological Background

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- 3.1.1 The Church of St. John is a Grade II\* listed parish church situated within the village of Grimston (LEN: 1188442). The Church dates broadly to the 13<sup>th</sup> century with later alterations. Little is known of the original 13<sup>th</sup> century footprint of the building, though it appears to have undergone a great deal of expansion and restoration in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Much of the church fabric is likely to belong to the 15<sup>th</sup> century phase of church development, with notable additions to the tower and belfry. The church is constructed of locally imported iron stone; the northern transept collapsed c.1740 and was not rebuilt.
- 3.1.2. A search of the Leicestershire and Rutland Heritage Gateway (LHER) identifies 16 known heritage assets within the village of Grimston. These comprise 3 farmhouses which bound the church to the north east and west (Hives farm, Red farmhouse and Church farmhouse/ barn), and hold Grade II listing, and ancillary church structures, funerary monuments and monuments associated with the historic village core, detailed below in the relevant section. No non-designated heritage assets were identified within the PDA or in a 1km radius.

### *Prehistoric*

- 3.1.3. No significant evidence for prehistoric activity has been identified within a 1km radius of the Church of St. John, though monitored drainage works in 1994 did uncover probable late Iron Age pottery adjacent to the current church footprint. These finds appear to



have been mixed, unstratified material. Subsequent work has not been published, and the date of these finds remains uncertain.

#### *Romano-British*

- 3.1.4. Evidence for Romano-British activity within the village of Grimston is limited to the presence of late Romano-British coins, dating to c.286-392AD, which were identified within a private garden in 1972. Additional sherds of possible Romano-British pottery were identified during monitored groundworks in 1994, which also identified possible Iron-Age ceramic material. The exact location of these finds is unknown.
- 3.1.5. It is possible that Romano-British settlement activity did occur in this area, given its proximity to the Six Hills Lane Roman road. However, no archaeological evidence of this has so far been identified (Allen et al. 2016).

#### *Early Medieval - Medieval – Modern*

- 3.1.6. The village of Grimston appears to originate in the later early-medieval period. The area takes name from a relatively common Old Norse personal name Grimr, which likely refer to an individual land owner, though it may also refer to the Norse God Othinn (or, "masked one"). The name Grimr was later taken to be associated with the Devil. The village later acquired the Old English suffix –tūn, naming it as a farmstead, or village (University of Nottingham 2018).
- 3.1.7. At the time of the Domesday survey, the village is recorded as a small hamlet, with 5 households and 2 freemen under the lordship of Robert de Bucy. There is no mention of a priest at this time, however the village appears to have been joined with the nearby villages of Shoby and Saxelby (Palmer 2018). An archaeological watching brief conducted by the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society in 1996 revealed possible evidence for a late Saxon hearth and limekiln on land immediately to the east of the Church boundary (LAHS 1996). A possible former Church boundary was also identified during these works.
- 3.1.8. A series of medieval and post-medieval field systems and ridge and furrow, visible as cropmarks, surround the church on all sides. These cropmarks probably represent part of peripheral agricultural activity.

## 4 Aims and Objectives

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### 4.1 Aims

- 4.1.1 Within the limitations of the proposed groundwork the excavation aimed to resolve a number of significant questions in relation to the use of the church site over time including:
- To determine the existence of any activity pre-dating the known medieval origins for the site.
  - To identify the presence of archaeological deposits relating to any earlier church structural remains.
  - To clarify the chronological structural phases for the existing church fabric that may be evident within any exposed foundations.
  - To identify, where possible, the presence of early burials.
  - To determine the presence of any below-ground burial monuments including stone or

lead coffins and brick burial vaults.

## 4.2 Objectives

The objective of the archaeological work was to ensure that any archaeological information present in the areas undergoing destructive removal of deposits were recorded appropriately and the results presented within a report (preservation by record).

## 4.3 Research Objectives

- 4.3.1 A number of research questions from the *East Midlands Research Framework* (Knight et al. 2012) were found to be significant in response to proposed works:

<b>Earl Medieval (c. AD 410 – 1066)</b>
<i>6.2 Ritual and Belief</i>
6. How can we enhance further our understanding of the development of pre-Viking churches, cathedrals and monasteries?
<b>Medieval (1066 – 1485)</b>
<i>7.5 Religion</i>
1. Can we identify additional pre-Conquest church, minster and monastic sites and elucidate the development of later monastic settlement?
4. Can we shed further light upon the distribution and development of early churches or chapels and the origins and growth of the parish system?

## 5 Methodology

- 5.1 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014b) and *Code of Conduct* (2014a).
- 5.2 All trenches for the placement of soakaways and drain runs were hand dug as much as possible under archaeological supervision. The drain runs were between 44m and 5m in length, and approximately 0.30m wide and 0.20m deep. As planned, the soakaway was to measure approximately 1.20m x 1.10m x 1.20m. However, to avoid unnecessary disturbance of human remains which were becoming more frequent at c.0.90m depth, it was decided to extend the soakaway approximately 0.30m to the west. The final dimensions were 1.80m x 1.20m x 0.80 – 0.90m, with the base of the soakaway having a slight north by south slope.
- 5.6 Stratigraphy was recorded, photographed and interpreted, even where no archaeological finds or features were present, in accordance with *CIfA Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014b).

- 5.7 All excavations were recorded at an appropriate scale by photography. Site photography was undertaken with the use of a high resolution colour DSLR camera, which included general site shots, shots of individual features, and groups of features.
- 5.8 Disarticulated bones were collected and a sample photographed before being reburied within the soakaway prior to backfilling.

## 6 Results

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- 6.1 Three trenches were cut for the placement of drain runs, which required removal of parts of the current church drainage system, with a further cut for the placement of the soakaway pit.
- 6.2 **Soakaway. Figures 2 and 3 (Dr#03); Plates 1 - 3.**
- 6.2.1 The soakaway comprised a box pit measuring 1.80 x 1.20 x 0.80 – 1.0m and was situated 7.0m south of the main entrance porch and immediately south of the footpath.
- 6.2.2 In the base of the soakaway was a layer of disturbed subsoil (0003), consisting of friable mid yellowish brown clayey silt seen to contain moderate inclusions of ceramic brick material (CBM) fragments. This had a thickness of up to 0.76m, being not fully excavated. A number of disarticulated bones were recovered from this context and subsequently reburied within the soakaway (Plates 4 - 5).
- 6.2.3 Within the soakaway to the north, principally visible in the south-facing section but also partially seen in the west and east-facing sections were layers associated with the construction of the footpath. Directly above the disturbed subsoil layer (0004) was a firm, dark yellowish brown foundation layer consisting of coarse sand and stone, (0002). In the northwest of the soakaway only, this was seen to be overlaid by the modern hardcore footpath, running approximately northeast by southwest across the southern part of the site. For the majority of the north-facing section and partly visible in the west-facing section, (0002) was sealed by the topsoil and turf, (0001) that was seen to be c. 0.12 – 0.22m thick and extended across the site.
- 6.2.4 Elsewhere within the soakaway, the disturbed subsoil (0004) was overlaid directly by the topsoil and turf layer, (0001).
- 6.3 **Drain runs. Figures 1 and 2; Plates 9 - 12.**
- 6.3.1 The three drain runs extended for between 5m and 44m around the church, which partly involved removal of the older drainage system installed c.1994. The trenches measured c.0.30m wide and were only excavated to a depth of c.0.20m, being seen to be within the topsoil layer (0001) with the exception of part of the east by west section to the west of the main entrance porch, where the base of the trench comprised a layer of disturbed topsoil/backfill from earlier drainage works, (0005). This was seen to be dark brown sand containing frequent inclusions of CBM and stone rubble fragments and was sealed by the topsoil (0001).
- 6.4 **Brick structure [0004]. Figures 2 and 3 (Dr#1 and 2); Plates: 6 – 7.**
- 6.4.1 Excavation of a section of the north by south drain run immediately parallel to the southern projecting transept revealed the remains of a brick structure [0004] truncated by a modern drain. This was comprised of four courses of reddish orange bricks c. 0.18 x 0.12 x 0.06m and parts of which were seen to be bonded with patches of cement/mortar. The eastern edge of the bricks appeared to directly abut the foundation/lower stone course of the church, and removal of a single course suggested that the feature did not continue into the east facing section of the trench, however this is not clear. A 0.12 – 0.08m deep sondage was excavated by the north facing elevation which showed the

structure to be within the topsoil (0001) and to have no further courses, giving the structure maximum dimensions of 0.46m x c.0.40m x 0.32m. See section 7.4 for a discussion and possible interpretations of this feature.

## 7 Discussion and Conclusions

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- 7.1 A number of disarticulated human remains were recovered from the disturbed subsoil, (0003) within the soakaway. Most of these comprised fragments of long bones, with a much smaller amount of cranial fragments, including a partially intact skull (Plates 4 – 5). These disarticulated remains are remnants of earlier phases of churchyard use for burial, and were collected together and reburied within the soakaway.
- 7.2 The increasing frequency of disarticulated remains suggests that burials could remain in-situ at a greater depth. Given the location of the soakaway opposite the main entrance porch this could be considered as extremely likely. In order to avoid unnecessary disturbance of probable in-situ human remains, it was agreed that the soakaway might be extended in length rather than depth to respect any burials.
- 7.3 Excavation of the drain runs did not run deeper than the topsoil, (0001) with one section revealing an interface between the topsoil and a layer of modern backfill/made ground (0005) (Plate 9). Immediately adjacent to the east facing elevation of the southern transept, a small brick structure [0004] was revealed, probably truncated by a later drain (Figures 2 and 3; Plates 6 and 7).
- 7.4 Interpretation of [0004] is difficult given the limitations of the excavation. It is possible that the feature constitute the remains of what must have been a small wall considering the shallow depth and its location within the topsoil. However, a wall aligned east-west would obstruct the main entrance porch, whilst a north-south alignment would immediately encounter the footpath. The latter is at least possible if [0004] predates the section of the path that continues to the northeast beyond the entrance porch. It is also possible that [0004] is the remains of an earlier drain, but this is based purely by its situation and later truncation by the current drain. The feature could alternatively be the remains of the lower course of a structural support, such as a brick buttress of the sort still extant on the north side of the church (Plate 8). Given the collapse of the northern transept, it is possible that steps were taken to support the southern transept, later removed when deemed to be no longer necessary. These interpretations remain speculative owing to the confines of the excavated area.

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## Appendix 1: Context Register

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Context	Category	Description	Phase
0001	Layer	Topsoil	Modern
0002	Layer	Made-ground for footpath	Post-med - Modern
0003	Layer	Disturbed subsoil	Med - Modern
0004	Structure	Remains of brick structure in north-south drain run adjacent to west facing elevation of southern transept.	Post-med - Modern
0005	Layer	Backfill from previous service works	Modern

## Appendix 2: Plates



Plate 1: West-facing section of the soakaway pit. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 2: Oblique view of the south-facing section of the soakaway pit. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 3: Oblique post-ex view of the soakaway pit. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 4: Disarticulated bones from the soakaway pit, c. 0.50 – 0.80m from the surface. Scale: 1 x 1m.





Plate 5: Disarticulated bones from the soakaway pit, c. 0.80 – 0.90m. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 6: Plan view of brick structure [0004]. Modern drain on the extreme right. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 7: North-facing elevation of [0004]. Scale: 1 x 1m

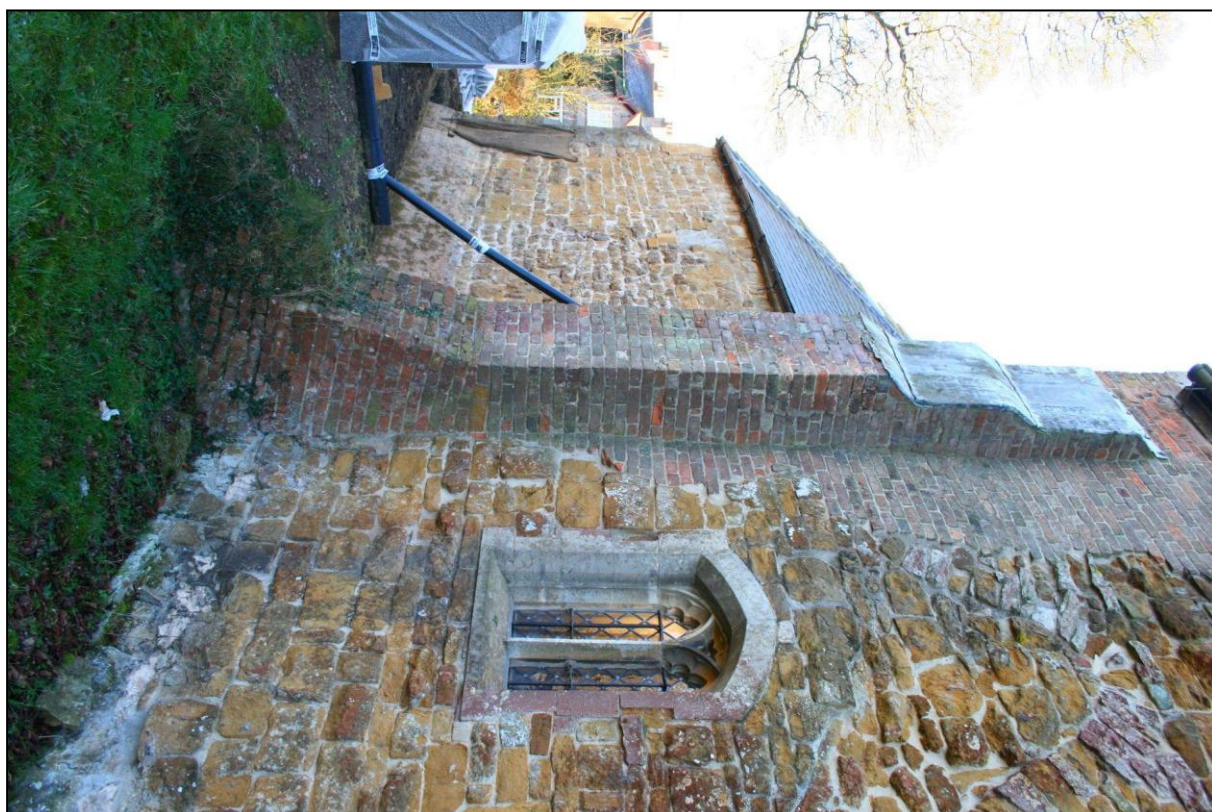


Plate 8: Brick buttress extant on the north side of the church. [0004] was possibly a similar structure.



Plate 9: Excavated east-west drain run adjacent to entrance porch showing backfill layer (0005). Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 10: Completed east – west drain run. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 11: Completed north – south section of drain run. Scale: 1 x 1m.



Plate 12: Completed east – west section of drain run. Scale: 1 x 1m.

## Appendix 3: Index of Archive and Arrangements for Deposition

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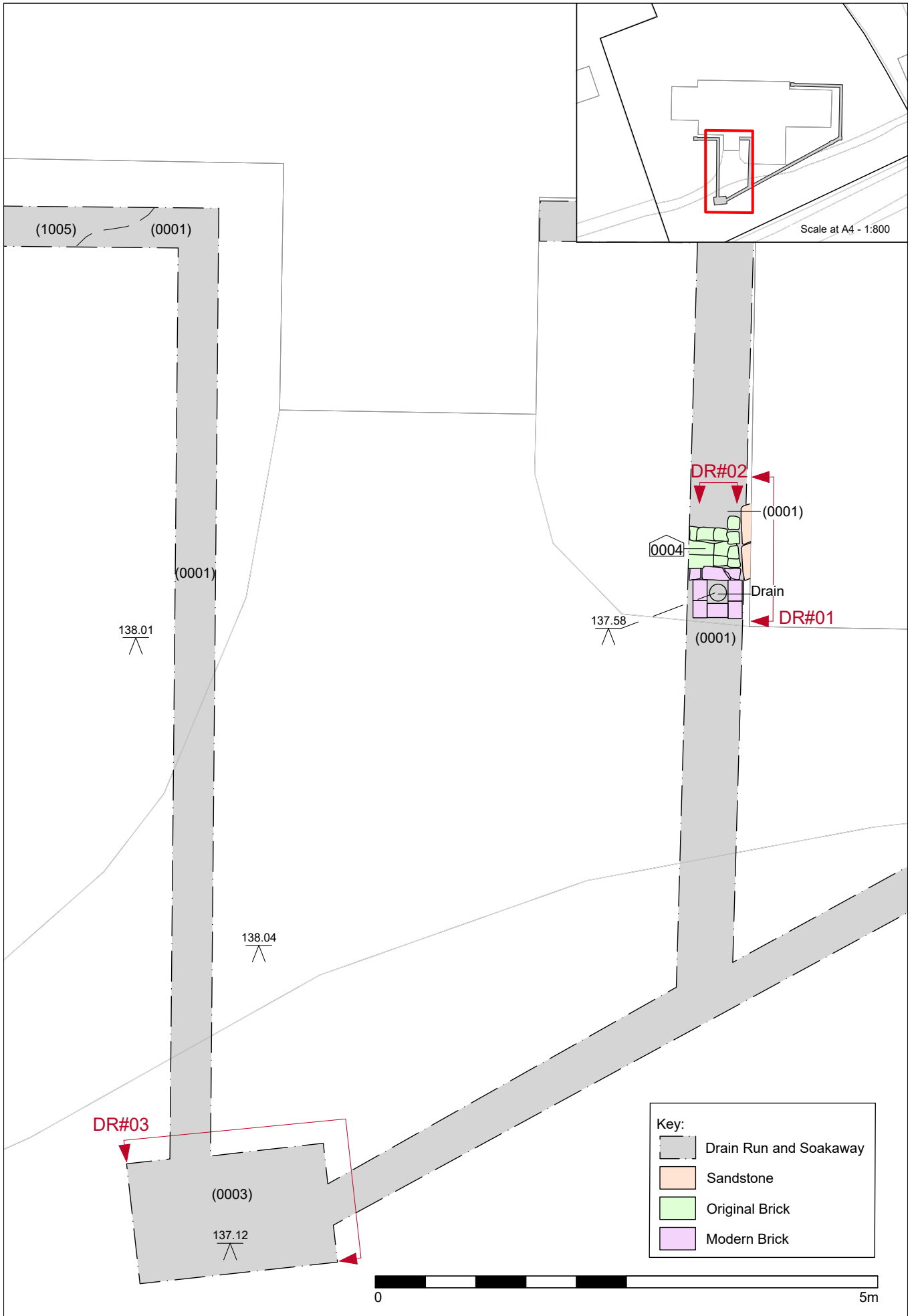
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Watching brief record sheets	Record of visit and work carried out	3
Context register	Register of context numbers and descriptions	1
Context sheets	Record of features and deposits	5
Photo record sheet	Record of photographs taken	1
Digital photographs	All views	72
Site drawings	Plan of site	5
<i>Documents</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Number</i>
Written scheme of investigation	Statement of the aims, objectives and methodology for the project.	1
Health & Safety	Safe working statement & risk assessment	1
Report to client	Report of findings of the watching brief.	1

The site archive is currently held at the offices of Trent & Peak Archaeology, Unit 1, Holly Lane, Chilwell, Nottingham, NG9 4AB. As no significant archaeological deposits or artefactual remains were recovered from the site, the archive will remain in the offices of Trent and Peak Archaeology.

## Appendix 4: Figures

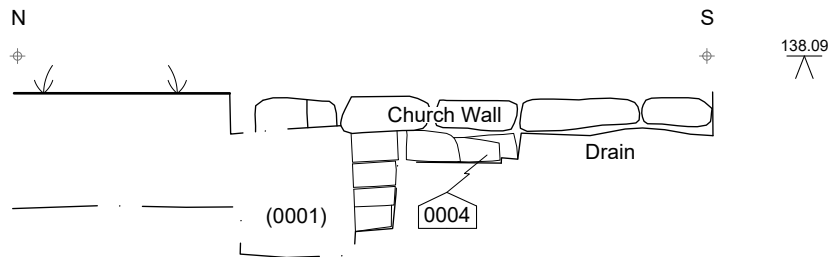
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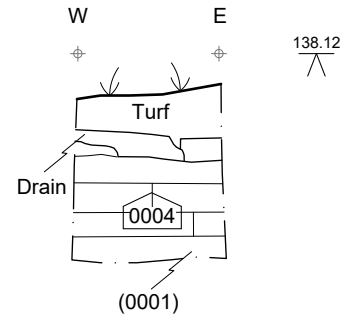




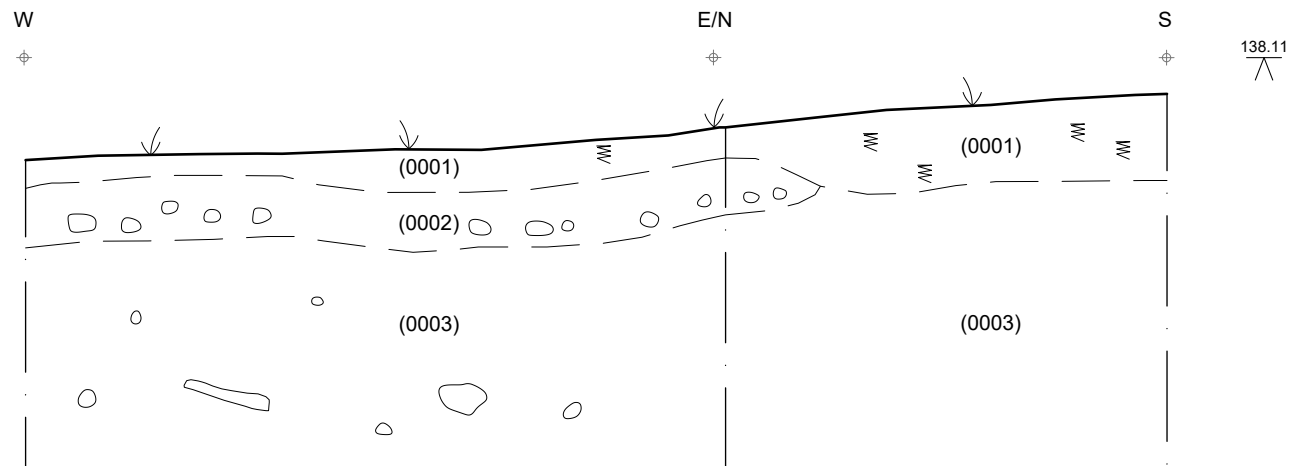
DR#01  
West Facing Section Of Church Wall Base, Drain and Structure 0004



DR#02  
South Facing Section Of Drain and Structure 0004



DR#03  
South and West Facing Sections Of Soakaway



## Appendix 5: Catalogue of Human Bone

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Element	Side	Age?	Sex?	Pathology?	No.	Comments
Cranial	N/A	Adult	? - Female?	None	1	Frontal, L parietal, partial R parietal
Cranial	N/A	Adult	N/A	None	1	Partial L and R parietal, fused
Cranial	N/A	Adult	N/A	None	1	Partial L and R parietal, fused
Cranial	N/A	Adult	N/A	None	1	Partial L parietal
Scapula?	?	Sub adult	N/A	None	1	
Femoral head	L	Adult	N/A	None	1	Partial neck as well
Tibia	R	Adult	N/A	None	1	Possible joining fragment; Proximal epiphysis only
Tibia	L	Adult	N/A	None	1	Mid shaft, distal epiphysis
Pelvis (Ilium)	L	Infant- Sub Adult	N/A	None	1	
Long bone (femoral?)	N/A	Adult	N/A	None	2	Fragments of diaphyses, undifferentiated.
Femur	R	Adult	N/A	None	1	Head & neck broken. Distal epiphysis missing.
Humerus	L	Adult?	? - Female?	None	1	Diaphysis and distal epiphysis, damaged
Tibia	L?	Adult?	N/A	None	1	Mid shaft only
Femur	L	Adult	N/A	Anteroposterior bend; associated bridge of bone	1	Shaft and distal epiphysis
Femur	?	Adult	N/A	None	1	Shaft only; fresh breaks
Cranial/ calvaria	N/A	Adult	? - Male?	None	1	Calvaria; partial nasals. Supra-orbital notch (R)