

**Archaeological test-pitting at the Church of St Michael and All Angels,
Hallaton, Leicestershire (Crypt Reinstatement Project)**

NGR: SP 78653 96529

Mathew Morris



Site Name: St Michael and All Angels Church, Hallaton

Grid Ref: SP 78653 96529

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Client: Hallaton Crypt Reinstatement Project

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OASIS RECORD

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	Site Address/Postcode	Church of St Michael and All Angels, Hallaton		
	Study Area	2 sq m		
	Site Coordinates	SP 78653 96529		
	Height OD	100m		
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	Project Brief Originator	Diocesan Archaeologist		
	Project Design Originator	Vicki Score		
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Archaeological test-pitting at the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Hallaton, Leicestershire (Crypt Reinstatement Project) SP 78653 96529

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation by test-pitting was carried out at the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Hallaton (SP 78653 96529) by University of Leicester Archaeological Services and the Hallaton Field Work Group between 25-26 August 2020. Work was undertaken for the Hallaton Crypt Reinstatement Project in order to establish the character and extent of any archaeological remains or structures present beneath the floor adjoining the west wall of the crypt in the north aisle and in the area of churchyard immediately next to the original crypt entrance to the north.

The test-pits revealed few archaeological features. Inside the church, late 19th-century restoration had removed earlier floor surfaces and deposits down to the natural substratum. No intrusive features were observed but the wall of the medieval crypt was identified. Some mud-bonded stonework still survived but the wall was extensively rebuilt in brick, probably during the late 19th-century.

Outside, a modern coal chute and drains were dug into the burial soil of the graveyard in front of the original crypt entrance. These concealed or had destroyed the steps leading down into the crypt and no further information could be gained without dismantling the 19th-century restoration work. However, it was determined that any groundwork associated with the proposed reinstatement of the crypt would likely impact upon surviving parts of the medieval west wall of the crypt.

The archive for this project will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums under the accession number X.A62.2020.

Introduction

In August 2020, University of Leicester Archaeological Services excavated two archaeological test-pits at the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Hallaton (Figure 1). The work was commissioned by the Hallaton Crypt Reinstatement Project.

Hallaton Parochial Church Council (PCC) has proposed a project to reinstate the crypt beneath the north aisle of the church and to subsequently inter the skeletons excavated from the nearby pilgrim chapel of St Morrell. Following consultation with Historic England, the Diocese Advisory Committee (DAC) required the PCC to apply for a faculty to investigate by test-pits two areas which were to be impacted by the proposed work (DAC ref. 2020-048570, Figure 2). This was carried out in conjunction with a geophysical survey (Resistivity) undertaken by Hallaton Field Work Group (HFWG).

The work was an initial stage of investigation, providing information to identify the character and extent of any remains or structures present beneath the flooring of the aisle adjoining the crypt and the area in the churchyard immediately next to the original entrance to the crypt, prior to a second main faculty application being submitted.

The test-pits were dug by volunteers from HFWG supervised by ULAS on 25-26 August 2020 and this report presents the results of the work.

Location and Geology

The Church of St Michaels and All Angels is situated on the west side of the village of Hallaton, on the junction of Langton Road, Churchgate and Eastgate at SP 78653 96529 (Figure 1). The church and churchyard are located on a terraced platform projecting from a south-facing slope at a height of approximately 100m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

The British Geological Survey identifies the bedrock geology of the area as interbedded siltstone and mudstone of the Dyrham Formation formed approximately 182-190 million years ago in the Lower Jurassic Period. No superficial deposits are identified.



Figure 1: Site Location

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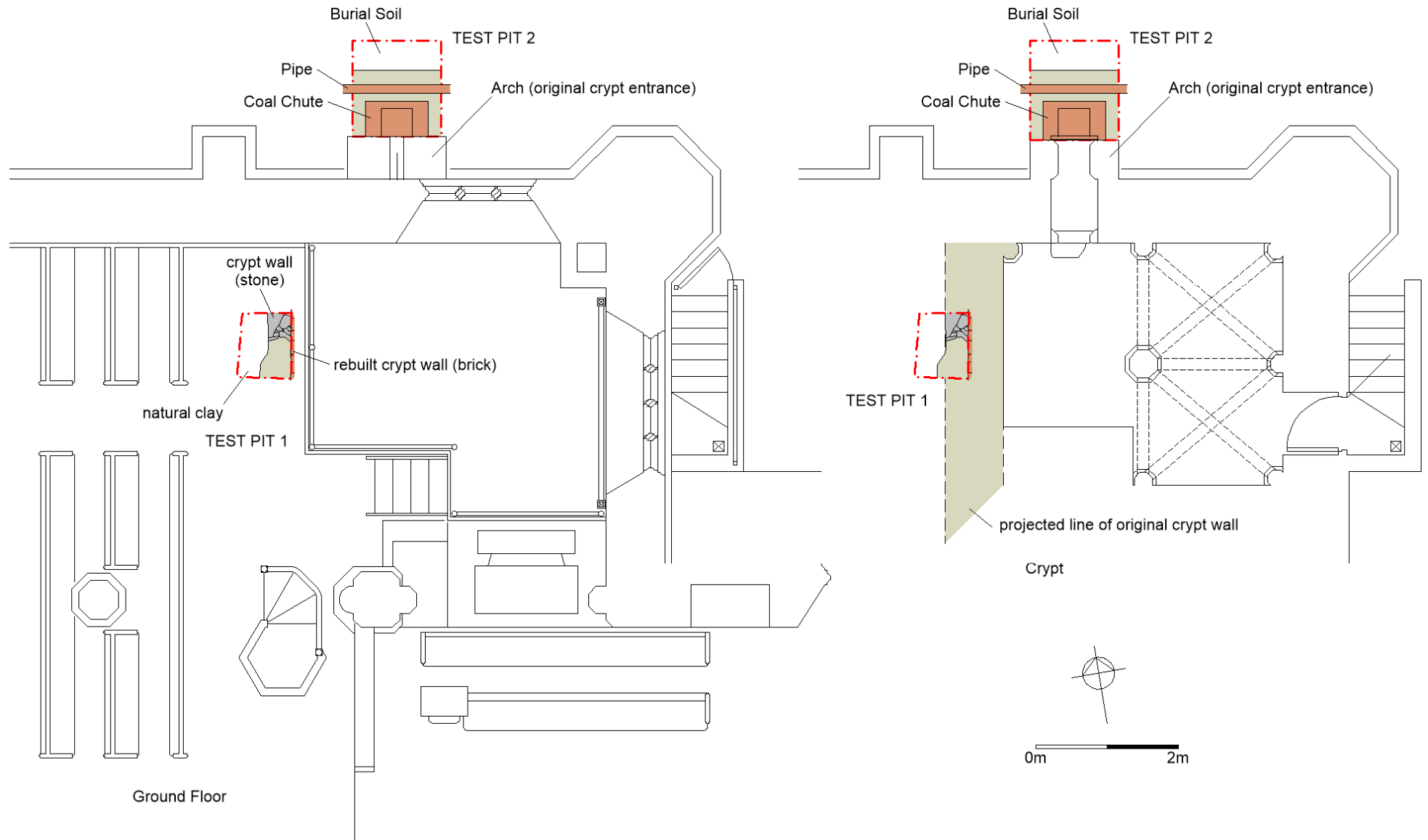


Figure 2: Plan of the crypt showing the location of the test-pits and the key archaeological observations. Image supplied by client.

Historical and Archaeological Background

The village of Hallaton has been in existence since before the Norman Conquest in 1066. Nearly half a mile west of the church is Castle Hill, the remains of a late 11th/12th-century motte and bailey castle and iron-working site. The stream flowing south-east past the castle and just south of the village is the scene of the Hallaton bottlekicking contest which takes place between the villages of Hallaton and Medbourne each Easter Monday.

Excavations on Hare Pie Hill above the village to the south – the starting point for the bottle kicking - have located the medieval chapel and cemetery of St Morrell. The chapel was excavated by the Hallaton Field Work Group (HFWG) and University of Leicestershire Archaeological Services. The results suggest that it was a place of pilgrimage in the medieval period and so far, more than 20 skeletons dating to the 14th century and later have been discovered in the graveyard surrounding the chapel.

The church of St Michael and All Angels is Grade I listed and described by Pevsner as “One of the most imposing of Leicestershire village churches.” The church is probably built on the site of an earlier Saxon church but the earliest reference to it is in the early 12th century when the advowson of half the rectory was granted by Daniel Crevequer to Leeds Priory in Kent.

The church is built of ironstone and limestone and consists of an aisled and clerestoried nave, chancel, north and south porches, west tower, and west vestry. The oldest part of the building dates from the late 12th century. The three bays at the west end of the north nave arcade are part of the late-12th-century building. The base of the tower may also be of the 12th century, re-faced soon after the middle of the 13th century when the upper stages were built. The chancel was rebuilt at approximately the same period. In the middle of the 14th century the aisles were raised and widened, the north aisle being also extended eastwards, and the porches were added (Lee & McKinley 1964).

Below the most easterly bay of the north aisle is a rib-vaulted crypt originally accessed from a small opening in the north wall. This was probably built as a private burial crypt but was later used as an ossuary and in recent years a boiler was housed in it. Dr Jennifer Crangle, an expert in crypts and ossuaries in Britain and Europe, asserts that Hallaton’s crypt is a classic 14th century example, a rare survivor from the period and important in its own right. There are now just four bays of the crypt left and two of these need urgent repairs.

Between 1889-91 the church was extensively restored. The box pews were removed, the roof pitches of both the nave and the chancel were raised, the font was moved to the south aisle from the transept and a new organ installed at the east end of the north aisle on a concrete platform above the present crypt. During alterations to the crypt, workmen found the skeletons of between 600-700 bodies, in what must have been “...the great charnel house, vaulted under the church...” It took 17 cartloads to empty the vault of bones (Morison 2019).

Archaeological Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological work were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits so that any further mitigation can be determined.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
- To advance understanding of the heritage assets.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the work was to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, significance and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits identified on the site in order to determine the potential impact upon them by the proposed development.

Test-pitting is an intrusive form of evaluation used to demonstrate the existence of earth-fast archaeological features which may exist within the area.

Research Objectives

The work was considered in light of the East Midlands Research Framework (Cooper 2006) and strategy (Knight *et al.* 2012). Research aims were reviewed and updated as the work progressed and new information came to light. The following research objectives had the potential to be addressed by this project:

Although work was taking place in and around a church, it was felt unlikely that articulated human remains would be encountered, as both areas under investigation were subject to previous disturbance. It was possible, however, that earlier features associated with the church could be encountered and given the location of the work, there was potential to identify deposits relating to the origins and the development of the medieval and post-medieval church.

In particular, the work had the potential to contribute towards the following Research Agenda topic:

7.5 High Medieval Religion:

7.5.4 Can we shed further light upon the distribution and development of early churches or chapels and the origins and growth of the parish system?

7.5.5 How can we refine our understanding of local and regional architectural styles, including sculptured stonework, decorations and monuments?

7.5.6 What may we deduce from scientific analyses of cemetery populations about changes in diet, mortality and other demographic variables, both within the region and between social groups?

As well as the following High Medieval Research Objectives:

7E Investigate the morphology of rural settlements

7F Investigate development, structure and landholdings of manorial estate centres.

Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* (rev. 2019) in accordance with their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (rev. 2014). The archaeological work followed the *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for Archaeological Test Pits* prepared by ULAS and agreed with the DAC (Baker 2020). The work was monitored by the client and the archaeological advisor to the diocese.

Although test-pit 1 was originally proposed to be 3m x 1m, a layer of concrete beneath the flagstones meant that a smaller 1m x 1m test-pit was excavated through the concrete in the centre of the area. This was agreed with the archaeological advisor to the diocese in advance of excavation.

The test-pits were hand excavated (Figure 3) in a series of 0.1m layers to the natural substratum or a maximum depth of 1m, dependent on which was reached first. All excavation was undertaken with a view to avoid damage to archaeological deposits or features which appeared worthy of preservation *in-situ* or warranted more detailed investigation than for the purposes of the project. All spoil was screened for finds using sieves with a standard 10mm mesh, except for any heavy clay soil which was hand searched. Test-pit locations were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid using appropriate methods. Once finished, the test-pit was filled in and the turf/floor reinstated.

Test-pits were recorded using pro-forma ULAS trench recording sheets. Where encountered, complex archaeological deposits were excavated and recorded using standard procedures. A photographic record of the investigations was also created illustrating in both detail and general context the test-pits excavated and the principal features and finds discovered. The photographic record also included 'working shots' to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

An accession number (X.A62.2020) was obtained prior to commencement of the project and used to identify all records and artefacts.

Following the opening of the test-pits the results were discussed with the archaeological advisor to the diocese, who agreed that no further work was required and that the test-pits could be backfilled.



Figure 3: Volunteers from HFWG excavate Test-pit 1(left) and Test-pit 2 (right).



Figure 4: Test-pit 1 in the north aisle of the church, looking north. The raised area to the right is the roof of the crypt.

Results

Test-pit 1

Test-pit 1 was situated in the north aisle of the church against the west wall of the crypt (Figure 4) where a new staircase is proposed leading down into the reinstated crypt. The area contained the Thomas Vowe (d.1691) ledger stone which was removed along with adjacent flagstones before work began. Beneath the flagstones was 20mm of dry lime mortar covering *c.*0.2m of concrete. This was consistent with church records from the late 19th-century restoration which indicated that the new floor was to be laid over 6" of cement (John Morison *pers. comm.*). This suggested that the Vowe memorial was not in its original position and no grave was uncovered beneath it.

Following the removal of the slab, a layer of concrete was uncovered. The concrete was removed from an area in the centre and a smaller test-pit excavated. Test-pit 1 measured *c.*1m by *c.*0.8m and was *c.*1m deep. Beneath the concrete on the west side of the test-pit was natural greyish-yellow silty-clay, probably the natural substratum. No earlier floors or deposits were observed. The clay was truncated to the east by the construction cut for the crypt which was *c.*0.36m wider than the present crypt wall (Figure 2). The present crypt wall formed the east edge of the test-pit. It appeared to have been mostly rebuilt in brick in the late 19th-century and was *c.*0.5m thick (Figure 5). Beneath the brick rebuild, at the north end of the test-pit and continuing north towards the aisle wall was the remains of a stone wall (Figure 6), presumed to be the original medieval crypt wall. The full width and depth of this earlier wall was not observed given the constraints of the test-pit but it was extrapolated to be *c.*0.86m wide with at least six courses of mud-bonded ironstone observed down to *c.*1m below the present floor level. No trace of this wall was observed from inside the crypt, although the lower courses of stonework in the rebuilt crypt wall could potentially have pre-dated its 'restoration'. The backfill of the construction cut for the rebuilt wall was a mixture of loose soil, rubble and clay which produced a small quantity of human charnel, modern pottery, glass and metalwork.



Figure 5: The rebuilt crypt wall built over the remains of an earlier stone wall, looking east.



Figure 6: The mud-bonded stone wall beneath the rebuilt crypt wall, looking north-east.



Figure 7: Test-pit 2 in front of the original entrance to the crypt, looking south.



Figure 8: The coal chute and drain dug into the burial soil in front of the original crypt entrance, looking north-west.

Test-pit 2

Test-pit 2 was situated outside the church against the wall of the north aisle in front of a partially blocked archway which formed the original entrance to the crypt (Figure 2, Figure 7). This was reworked during the church's restoration in the late 19th-century, when a new entrance was inserted through the east wall of the crypt and the original entrance was converted into a coal chute for a boiler which was installed in the crypt. The original steps down into the crypt were allegedly replaced or covered over with a brick and cement chute. This was surrounded by a gravel path and bordered by grassed-over graves.

The test-pit measured *c.* 1.5m by *c.* 1.2m and was between *c.* 0.3-0.5m deep. Removal of gravel from path, which projected *c.* 1m from the aisle wall, revealed two ceramic drainpipes running parallel with the wall (Figure 8). The pipes were *c.* 120mm diameter and were laid one over the other, at *c.* 50mm and *c.* 0.4m below the ground. The gravel filled the pipe-trench as well as the path and must have been intended to act as a soakaway. The brickwork of the coal chute extended down into the gravel at least five courses, with the lowest observed course projecting out slightly as a plinth. No evidence for the original steps into the crypt was observed and no further work was carried out in the gravel.

The northern *c.* 0.5m of the test-pit was dug into the grass of the churchyard adjacent to the gravestone of Elizabeth Barnett (d.1862). Turf and *c.* 0.1m of dark brownish-grey clayey-silt topsoil covered firm orange-grey silty-clay which produced human charnel and modern pottery, glass and metalwork. The soil was a mixture of reworked natural clay and topsoil which formed a homogenous burial soil and could be seen in the pipe-trench section to be over *c.* 0.4m thick. No grave cuts or structural features

associated with the church were observed and it was felt unlikely that the original crypt steps extended this far beyond the church wall.

Finds

In all, 61 finds were recovered from the two test-pits. Finds were exclusively recovered from the late 19th-century foundation cut for the rebuilt crypt wall in Test-Pit 1 and the burial soil in Test-Pit 2. The finds were catalogued and spot-dated by the author and are listed below (Table 1). A small quantity of human charnel was also recovered from both test-pits. This was not catalogued and was reburied immediately before the test-pits were filled in.

Table 1: Catalogue of finds.

TP	No.	Wt (g)	Material	Description	Date
1	3	23	Pot	EA10 China/porcelain c.1750-2000	Post-medieval+
1	2	49	Pot	EA1 Glazed earthenware (joining sherds) c.1500-1750	Post-medieval
1	1	89	Glass	Green bottle neck, beer bottle?	Modern
1	3	10	Glass	Clear bottle glass 1-2mm thick	Modern
1	18	23	Glass	Clear window glass, some iridescence, one piece may be the tip from a diamond shaped windowpane.	Modern
1	1	97	Iron	Square headed, hand-made iron nail 195mm x 10mm x 7mm	Undated
1	1	10	Lead	Window came, bent over, 8mm wide	Undated
2	7	12	Pot	EA10 China/porcelain c.1750-2000	Modern
2	2	21	Pot	EA2 Glazed earthenware c.1600-2000	Post-medieval
2	15	27	Glass	Clear window glass	Post-medieval+
2	1	8	Glass	Green bottle glass 4mm thick	Post-medieval+
2	1	362	Iron	Horseshoe, broken half with nail, when complete would be for hoof c.180mm wide	Post-medieval+
2	1	5	Iron	Square headed, hand-made iron nail 45mm x 4mm	Undated
2	1	26	Iron	Strap, 140mm x 20mm x 2mm	Modern
2	3	19	Lead	Window came, folded over, 8-10mm wide	Undated
2	1	47	Lead	Sheet offcut, triangular 70mm x 40mm x 2mm	Modern?

Resistivity Survey

Prior to the test-pitting a resistivity survey was undertaken on the 22nd August by the Hallaton Field Work Group (HFWG) on a 10 x 10m area around Test-pit 2.

Resistivity was chosen as the most efficient and effective method of locating possible structures associated with the original steps into the crypt. The aim was to locate and characterise any anomalies of possible archaeological interest within the study area.

Instrument	Traverse Interval	Sample Interval
Geoscan RM15 & Terrasurveyor software	1m	0.25m

The area covered comprised a 10m grid on the north side of the church centred around test-pit 2 (Figure 9). The area contained a flagstone path and a number of gravestones as well as old tree stumps (Figure 10).



Figure 9: Location of Resistivity Survey (shaded blue) in relation to Test-pit 2 (blue square).

The results showed a ‘busier’ area along the church wall and the buttresses as well as a darker linear feature that corresponds with the pathway, but were otherwise negative for any anomalies and it seems likely that the path and graves in the area will have affected the result (Figure 11).



Figure 10: Resistivity survey being undertaken. The entrance to the crypt is visible in the top image.

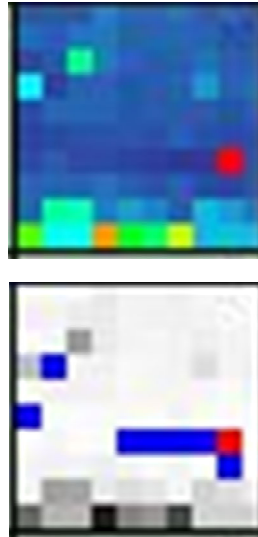


Figure 11: Results of the Resistivity Survey (church wall is along the bottom)

Discussion and Conclusion

The test-pitting at St Michael and All Angels Church, Hallaton found few archaeological features. Inside the church, late 19th-century restoration had removed earlier floor surfaces and deposits down to the natural substratum. No intrusive features (i.e. graves) were observed but the wall of the medieval crypt was identified. Some mud-bonded stonework still survived but the wall was extensively rebuilt in brick, probably during the 19th-century restoration when the crypt roof was reinforced to support an organ.

Outside the church, in front of the original entrance to the crypt, a modern coal chute and drains were dug into the burial soil of the graveyard. These concealed or had destroyed the steps leading down into the crypt.

No further information about the crypt could be gained without dismantling the 19th-century restoration work. However, it is likely that any groundwork associated with the proposed reinstatement of the crypt will impact upon surviving parts of the medieval west wall of the crypt and this could be recording during a watching brief on the groundworks.

Archive and publication

The archive for this project will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A62.2020 and consists of the following: a copy of this report (ULAS Report No. 2020-135), trench recording sheets, a photo record sheet, a contact sheet of digital photographs, a CD of digital photographs and finds including pottery, glass and metalwork.

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work through the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York.

A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in a suitable regional archaeological journal in due course.

Acknowledgements

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