
Archaeology & Built Heritage

Archaeological Attendance During Trial Pit Investigation at
the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Peckleton, Leicestershire

NGR: SK 47020 00838

Undertaken on behalf of

Peckleton Parochial Church Council

by

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Archaeology & Built Heritage

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Summary

Archaeology & Built Heritage monitored the excavation of four engineering trial pits at the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Church Road, Peckleton, Leicestershire, LE9 7RA on the 28th October 2020. The archaeological investigation was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council.

The external trial pits were located against the north, east and south walls of the chancel and were required to establish the nature and depth of the wall foundations, to inform a programme of drainage works.

The four trial pits all revealed similar evidence for the nature and depth of the chancel wall foundations, with the granite rubble walls carried on a foundation of compacted pebbles set within a construction cut between c. 0.4m and 0.6m deep (below present ground level).

The external ground surface immediately adjacent to the chancel walls is blue brick paving that probably dates from the documented restoration of the church in 1869 by F.B Osborn. There is a single course of the superstructure below this surface, which rests on the compacted pebble foundations.

As part of the 1869 restoration the external walls of the chancel were refaced in granite rubble. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the trial pits and it is not clear whether the compacted pebble foundations relate to the construction of the chancel in the 14th century, or were added in 1869 to support the new granite rubble facing.

Inhumation burials were recorded in the two trial pits located against the east end wall of the chancel. One of these, in Trial Pit 3, was truncated by the pebble-filled foundation trench on this side. Human remains were also present in Trial Pit 4, against the south chancel wall. The burials were not excavated.

The project archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service under the Accession Code: X.A86.2021.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A programme of Archaeological Attendance for Inspection and Recording (a 'Watching Brief') was undertaken during the excavation of engineering trial pits at the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Church Road, Peckleton, Leicestershire, LE9 7RA.
- 1.2 The archaeological investigation was conducted by Neil Finn of Archaeology & Built Heritage on the 28th October 2020, at the request of Chris Whitby, Churchwarden for Peckleton Parochial Church Council (PCC).
- 1.3 The four external trial pits were required by the architects, Darnton B3 Architecture, to establish the nature and depth of the foundations of the chancel, to inform a programme of drainage works.
- 1.4 The trial pits were excavated by David Sleight Conservation staff.
- 1.5 Archaeological attendance during the excavation of the trial pits was requested by Dr Michael Hawkes, the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor.
- 1.6 The archaeological investigation was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014, updated October 2020).

2.0 Location, Topography and Geology

- 2.1 Peckleton is a village and civil parish in the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough of Leicestershire. The village lies approximately 8 miles (13 km) west of Leicester and 6 miles (10 km) north-east of Hinckley (Figure 1).
- 2.2 Peckleton village lies on the course of a Roman road between Leicester and Mancetter, which follows the route of the present Main Street. The medieval church and manor house lie to the south of the modern village.
- 2.3 The Church of St Mary Magdalene is located on the north side of Church Road, at National Grid Reference: SK 47020 00838 (Figure 2; Photos 1-2).
- 2.4 The church is situated on the eastern side of a stream valley, on ground that falls to the west. A benchmark c. 0.8m above ground level on the north face of the north-west buttress of the church tower has a value of 117.714m above Ordnance Datum.
- 2.5 British Geological Survey mapping records the solid geology of the area as Edwalton Member Mudstone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 228 to 237 million years ago in the Triassic period, when the local environment was dominated by hot deserts. Overlying the bedrock are glacio-fluvial deposits of Sand and Gravel, which

were formed up to 2 million years ago during ice age conditions (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyOfBritain/viewer.html> accessed 16/09/2020).

- 2.6 The geological natural ground exposed in the course of the trial pit investigation consisted of a stiff red-brown clay.

3.0 Statutory Designation

- 3.1 The Church of St Mary Magdalene is included on the statutory national list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. It was listed at Grade I on 7 November 1966. The listing description reads as follows:

Parish church. Early to mid-C14 with C16 alterations; restored 1869 by F.B. Osborn of Birmingham. Random rubble with freestone dressings, and Swithland slate roofs with stone coped verges. West tower, 4-bay nave with south aisle and north and south porches, 3-bay chancel. West tower: 3 stages with offsets, diagonal buttresses to the western corners and square set buttresses at the eastern corners, all surmounted by panelled and crocketed pinnacles, set diagonally to their respective buttresses; crenellated parapet with continuous moulded coping and recessed octagonal tower with crocketed angles and 2 tiers of lucarnes. Pointed west window with concave quarter-round-moulded surround and ogee-moulded hood ending in carved heads: 2 lights with flowing tracery incorporating an ogival heart shaped motif. The belfry lights have cusped Y-tracery beneath 4-centred arches; these are probably late C14. Nave and south aisle: The south front has a square-headed window at the west end; 2 lights with truncated reticulations over; the other two windows on this side also have 2 lights with reticulated tracery beneath 2-centred arches; all have hood moulds with head-stops. 4 C16 clerestory windows of 2 trefoil-headed lights beneath 4-centred arches, and concave half-round-moulded surrounds. C19 south porch with pointed opening on one order of shafts with stiff leaf capitals and roll and fillet moulded arch. Diagonal corner buttresses and crenellated parapet with continuous coping and hollow chamfered string. In the east wall of the aisle is a C16 window of 3 trefoil-headed lights beneath a 3-centred arch; above is another clerestory window. Similar C16 windows on the north side of the nave but transomed. North porch matching that on the south side. Chancel: One C15 south window of 3 trefoil-headed lights and perpendicular tracery beneath a square head; C14 east window with 4 trefoil-headed lights and flowing tracery containing an ogival heart-shaped motif, and a hood mould with head-stops. The north windows are C19 restorations.

Interior: C14 four-bay south arcade of double chamfered pointed arches on octagonal columns with moulded capitals and bases. The tower arch has an outer chamfered surround and an inner chamfered arch springing from corbels with carved heads. Chancel arch on engaged semi-octagonal columns with moulded capitals. C19 king-post roof over nave. C19 braced collar roof over chancel. Fixtures and fittings: C12 font with cylindrical pedestal and basin, the latter decorated with a pattern of concentric lozenges. Above the tower arch is a hatchment depicting the arms of Queen Victoria, presented to the church in 1863. Incorporated into the west wall of the south aisle is the side of a C16 alabaster chest tomb with an arcade containing figures. Below it is the medieval parish chest, the lid being made of a single piece of wood. At the east end of the aisle is a piscina with ogee head, indicating that this part of the aisle was once a chapel. C19 hexagonal stone pulpit with traceried sides. Piscina in the chancel with dog-tooth surround, apparently C13. Monuments: in the south wall of the chancel is an early C14 tomb recess with ogee arch surmounted by a cross, and 2 orders of convex quarter-round mouldings. On each side the mouldings are terminated at floor level by a trefoil-headed panel containing a carved figure; within the recess is the effigy of a civilian with hands raised in prayer. On the north side of the chancel is a near identical recess containing the effigy of a knight wearing chain armour including a coif de mailles, and a belted surcoat reaching to the knees; his legs are crossed. Next to him but outside the recess is the effigy of a lady with wimple headdress. On the north wall of the chancel is the incised top from an early C16 chest tomb showing a knight in full plate armour flanked by 2 ladies. Tablets to the Reverend William Wood, died 1814, and Robert Chesser, died 1831, the latter having the carved picture of a graveyard with portrait medallion above. Stained glass: 2 small panels of C14 fragments in the chancel south east, including a nun and a St. Michael. The east window of 1894 is by Kempe. B.O.E. p.347.

- 3.2 The church is not subject to any other statutory designations and is not within a Conservation Area.

4.0 Historical and Archaeological Background

- 4.1 Peckleton village lies on the course of the Roman road between Leicester and Mancetter. A Roman site to the south-east of the village is recorded on the Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER ref MLE16849).
- 4.2 There was a settlement at Peckleton before the Norman Conquest, which is recorded in the *Domesday Book* of 1086 as *Pechintone* (Morris 1979, 13:12). The place-name is Old English in origin and translates as either 'the village/estate associated with a man

called Peohtla' (if the affix is derived from *-ingtūn*), or the village/estate of Peohtla (if the affix is just *-tūn*). Names in *-ingtūn* appear to belong to the 8th century and in Leicestershire are limited to the west of the county, indicating later Anglo-Saxon settlement on the poorer soils of this region (Cox 2014, 205-6).

- 4.3 Earthwork remains of the medieval settlement, which was more extensive than the present village, have been mapped by Hartley (2008, 46-7, Fig. 36). The historic settlement core of the village is recorded in HER entry MLE16887.
- 4.4 The antiquarian John Nichols provides an account of the history of Peckleton down to the end of the 18th century in volume IV, part II of his *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (Nichols 1811, 869-875). This includes a description and illustration of the church, prior to its restoration in 1869 (reproduced here as Figure 3).
- 4.5 A detailed account of the descent of the manor and an illustrated description of the church was published in Volume 17, Part I of the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society* (Skillington, Farnham and Herbert 1932), which is available at <https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/PeckletonPagesfromVolume17.pdf>.
- 4.6 Pevsner provides a brief description of the church, which he suggests is mostly early 14th century. The church was restored in 1869 by F.B. Osborn of Birmingham (Pevsner and Williamson 1992, 347).
- 4.7 The church is recorded on the Leicestershire and Rutland HER under entry MLE13072, which repeats the listing description and Pevsner's account. The churchyard has a separate HER entry: MLE21440.
- 4.8 In 1985, an archaeological investigation during drainage works located a wall foundation 0.6m to the south of the south aisle and parallel to it, which may be the foundation of an earlier chapel on this site (*TLAHS LX* (1986), 94; HER ref: MLE13072).

5.0 Research Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 Regional research aims are defined in *East Midlands Heritage: An Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands* (Knight, Vyner and Allen 2012), which builds on an earlier resource assessment and research agenda: *The Archaeology of the East Midlands: An Archaeological Assessment and Research Agenda* (Cooper 2006).
- 5.2 The archaeological investigation was identified as having the potential to contribute towards themes defined in Section 6.7 of *East Midlands Heritage: An Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands*, which provides a research agenda for the High Medieval period (1066-1485), specifically aspects

covered in paragraph 7.5: *Religion*; and also Section 6.8 which provides a research agenda for the post-medieval period (1485-1750), specifically para. 8.6: *Ecclesiastical structures, estates and burials* (Knight, Vyner and Allen 2012, 94, 108).

5.3 The specific objectives of the archaeological investigation, as set out in the WSI, were:

- To identify the presence/absence of buried archaeological remains within the engineering trial pits
- To establish the character, extent and date range of any buried archaeological remains that are encountered
- To record any archaeological remains that are encountered
- To interpret any such remains within the context of the known current and previous land use of the site and wider area
- To produce a report and archive of the results of the investigation

6.0 Method Statement

6.1 The archaeological watching brief monitored the excavation of four test pits located on either side of the buttresses at the north-east and south-east corners of the church, which served to establish the nature and depth of the north, east and west wall foundations of the chancel.

6.2 The trial pits were excavated by David Sleight Conservation staff using hand tools.

6.3 The excavated trial pits were recorded by the archaeologist in accordance with the methodology set out in section 7 of the approved WSI. Written, drawn and photographic records were made. The drawn record included a plan and section of each trial pit. Context numbers were allocated to archaeological deposits in a single consecutive sequence (contexts 1-18). These context numbers are used to identify the archaeological remains in this report. Cut numbers are cited in square brackets, e.g. foundation trench cut [11]. Feature fills, layers and structures are cited in round brackets, e.g. fill (10) of foundation trench [11].

6.4 The trial pit locations are shown in Figure 4 and the plans and sections are illustrated in Figures 5-8.

6.5 The trial pits were backfilled on completion of the investigation and the blue brick paving reinstated.

7.0 Results

7.1 On the north, east and south sides of the chancel there is an external surface composed of blue engineering bricks, set in mortar, that falls away from the church, directing surface water into an adjacent drainage channel, also formed in blue brick. The dimensions of the bricks are: 229 x 111 x 70 mm (9 x 4 x 2 ¾ inches). In all four trial pits the blue brick surface was allocated the context number (1) and the associated bedding layer of sand beneath it, context number (2).

Trial Pit 1 (Figure 5; Photos 3-4)

7.2 Trial Pit 1 was located against the external face of the north wall of the chancel, adjacent to the buttress at the north-east corner. The maximum dimensions of this trial pit were: 1.10m E-W x 0.80m N-S x 0.60m deep.

7.3 The blue brick surface (1) was laid on a bedding layer of sand (2), to a depth of 0.12m. Below this a linear cut [5] was exposed in plan, 0.29m north of the north chancel wall and parallel with it. The cut had a near-vertical northern edge and a flat base that was 0.6m below the level of the blue-brick surface. The cut contained two fills, the upper of which (3) was a red-orange coloured sandy clay containing a few pebbles. The lower fill (4) was a compact deposit composed of water-worn pebbles in a red-brown sandy clay matrix.

7.4 Cut [5] was evidently a construction trench for the north chancel wall foundation, with the granite rubble wall built off the compacted pebble lower fill (4). The base of the granite rubble wall was 0.24m below the blue brick surface and 0.55m below the top of the chamfered limestone plinth course on this elevation.

7.5 No finds were recovered from Trial Pit 1 and no human remains were encountered.

Trial Pit 2 (Figure 6; Photos 5-6)

7.6 Trial Pit 2 was located against the external face of the east wall of the chancel, adjacent to the buttress at the north-east corner. The maximum dimensions of this trial pit were: 1.05m N-S x 0.50m E-W x 0.55m deep.

7.7 Below the brick surface (1) and its sand bedding layer (2), a linear cut [7] was exposed in plan, at a depth of 0.12m below the blue brick surface. The eastern edge of this was 0.19m east of the outer face of the chancel wall and parallel with it. Cut [7] had a vertical eastern edge, the base was not exposed; it contained a single fill (6) composed of water-worn pebbles in a compact red-brown sandy clay matrix.

7.8 Cut [7] was a construction trench for the east chancel wall foundation, with the granite rubble wall built off the compacted pebble fill (6). The base of the granite rubble wall was at 0.19m below the blue brick surface and 0.50m below the top of the chamfered

limestone plinth course on this elevation. Between the lowest two courses of the wall was a bed of black bitumen that served as a damp proof course.

- 7.9 The construction trench [7] was cut through a red-brown sandy clay layer with common inclusions of small pebbles (8). Within this deposit, at a depth of 0.50m below the surface, articulated human remains (9), representing an inhumation burial, were encountered. Excavation was terminated at this depth and the burial was not exposed or investigated further. No finds were recovered from Trial Pit 2.

Trial Pit 3 (Figure 7; Photos 7-8)

- 7.10 Trial Pit 3 was located against the external face of the east wall of the chancel, adjacent to the buttress at the south-east corner. The maximum dimensions of this trial pit were: 0.95m N-S x 0.55m E-W x 0.40m deep.
- 7.11 Beneath the blue brick surface (1) and its sand bedding layer (2), a linear cut [11] was exposed in plan at a depth of 0.09m. The eastern edge of this was 0.20m east of the external face of the chancel wall and parallel with it. The eastern edge of cut [11] was vertical and the visible portion of its base sloped gradually to the west; its maximum depth was 0.40m below the blue brick surface. The construction cut [11] contained a single fill (10) composed of water-worn pebbles in a compact mid-brown coloured sandy clay matrix.
- 7.12 The base of the east chancel wall was 0.13m below the blue brick surface and 0.44m below the top of the chamfered limestone plinth course on this elevation. The wall was founded on the compact pebble fill (10) of the construction trench [11]. Between the lowest two courses of the wall was a bed of black bitumen that served as a damp proof course.
- 7.13 The construction trench [11] was cut through a compact red-brown sandy clay layer with occasional inclusions of large pebbles (12). Below (12), at a depth of 0.30m, was the geological natural ground, which consisted of firm red-brown coloured clay. Cut into the geological natural ground at the north end of the trial pit was a grave [14], within which a pair of adult femurs were partially exposed (13). The western half of this grave was truncated when the construction cut [11] for the foundation of the east wall of the chancel was excavated, indicating that the burial predates the chancel. The human remains were left *in situ* and no other finds were recovered from this trial pit.

Trial Pit 4 (Figure 8; Photos 9-10)

- 7.14 Trial Pit 4 was located against the external face of the south wall of the chancel, adjacent to the buttress at the south-east corner. The maximum dimensions of this trial pit were: 1.24m E-W x 0.85m N-S x 0.56m deep.

- 7.15 Beneath the blue brick surface (1) and its sand bedding layer (2), a linear cut [16] was exposed in plan at a depth of 0.17m. This was aligned east-west, parallel with the chancel wall and 0.30m south of its external face. The southern edge of the construction cut was near vertical and its flat base was 0.56m below the level of the blue brick surface. Cut [16] contained a single fill (15), composed of water-worn pebbles in a compact red-brown sandy clay matrix. A human long-bone and other fragments of chancel (17) were found within fill (15), laid against the southern edge of cut [16]; these were left *in situ* and reburied when the trial pit was backfilled.
- 7.16 The base of the south chancel wall was 0.14m below the blue brick surface and 0.44m below the top of the chamfered limestone plinth course on this elevation. The wall was founded on the compacted pebble fill (15) of the construction trench [16].
- 7.17 The construction trench [16] was cut through a red-brown coloured sandy clay layer (18), below which the geological natural clay occurred at a depth of 0.45m.
- 7.18 Other than the human bones noted above, there were no finds from this trial pit.

8.0 Discussion

- 8.1 The four trial pits all revealed similar evidence for the nature and depth of the chancel wall foundations, with the granite rubble masonry carried on a foundation of compacted pebbles set within a construction cut between c. 0.4m and 0.6m deep (measured from present ground level).
- 8.2 The external ground surface immediately adjacent to the chancel walls is blue brick paving that probably dates from the 1869 restoration by F.B Osborn. There is a single masonry superstructure course below the level of this surface, which rests on the compacted pebble foundation.
- 8.3 A layer of bitumen was observed in Trial Pits 2 & 3, between the lower two stone courses of the east wall, which presumably served as a damp proof course. No equivalent damp proofing of the north and south walls was observed in Trial Pits 1 & 4.
- 8.4 Herbert's description of the church, published in 1932, makes it clear that the exterior of the chancel was refaced in granite as part of the restoration undertaken in 1869, and that the buttresses were also added at that time (Skillington, Farnham and Herbert 1932, 146).
- 8.5 It is not clear whether the pebble-filled foundation trenches date to the period when the chancel was constructed in the 14th century, or were added specifically to support the new granite facing in 1869. The absence of finds (other than human bone) from any of the trial pits precludes any confident assertion regarding the date of the foundations.

- 8.6 Excavation of the foundation trench for the east chancel wall truncated the western half of a grave [14] that was partially exposed in Trial Pit 3. The inclusion of charnel (17) within the fill of the construction cut [16] for the south chancel wall foundation, exposed in Trial Pit 4, indicates that other burials were also affected by the excavation of the foundation trenches. These burials must predate the foundation trenches but their age is uncertain. The relatively shallow depth of the burials exposed in Trial Pit 2 (c. 0.5m below present ground level) and Trial Pit 3 (c. 0.3m below present ground level) tends to suggest that these are earlier rather than later in date and they could be medieval.
- 8.7 The burials encountered in Trial Pits 2 & 3 serve to confirm that there are a number of unmarked graves immediately outside the east end of the chancel.

9.0 Project Archive and Finds

- 9.1 The project archive consists of:

- 4 x annotated permagraph drawing sheets (290 x 320 mm)
- 1 x A4 context index sheet
- 14 x colour digital photographs (in high resolution .jpeg format)
- Catalogue of photographs
- A copy of this report

- 9.2 No finds were recovered. All human remains were left *in situ*.

- 9.3 The project archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service under the Accession Code: X.A86.2021.

10.0 Publication

- 10.1 A summary of the findings of the project will be submitted to the editor of the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* for inclusion in their annual roundup of archaeological work in Leicestershire and Rutland.
- 10.2 The full report will be made available via the Archaeology Data Service's OASIS website.

11.0 Bibliography

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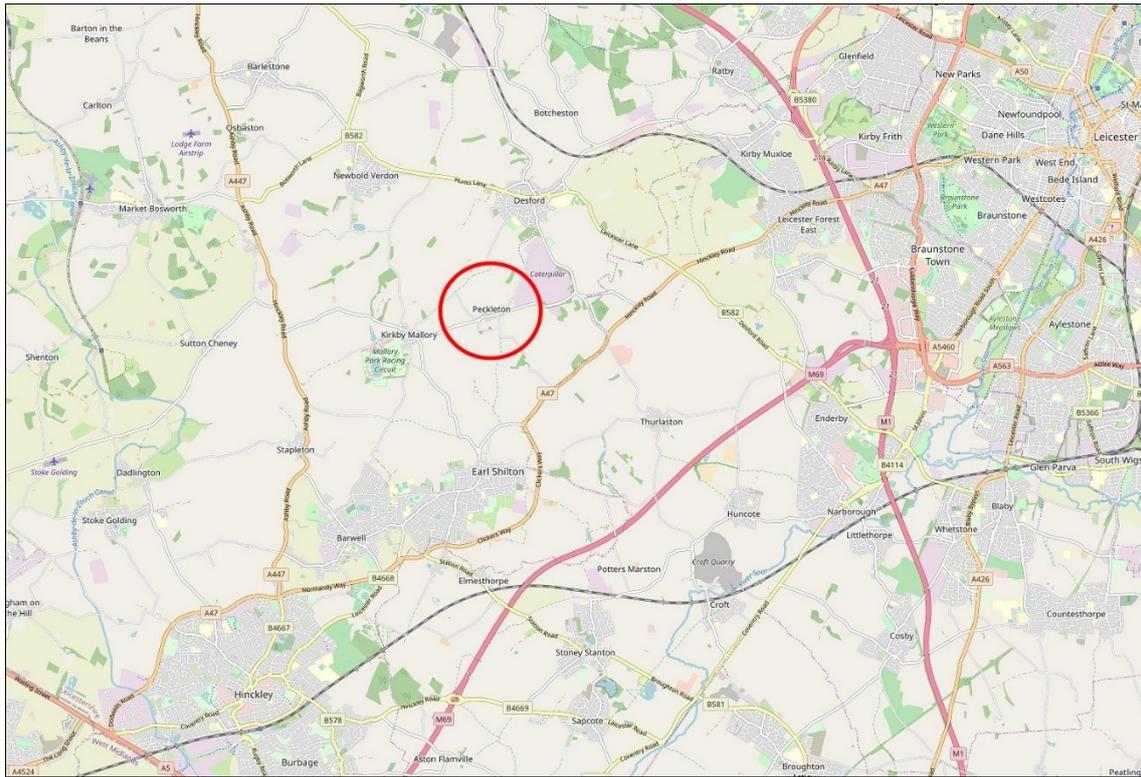


Figure 1. General Location Plan, Peckleton circled in red. © OpenStreetMap contributors.

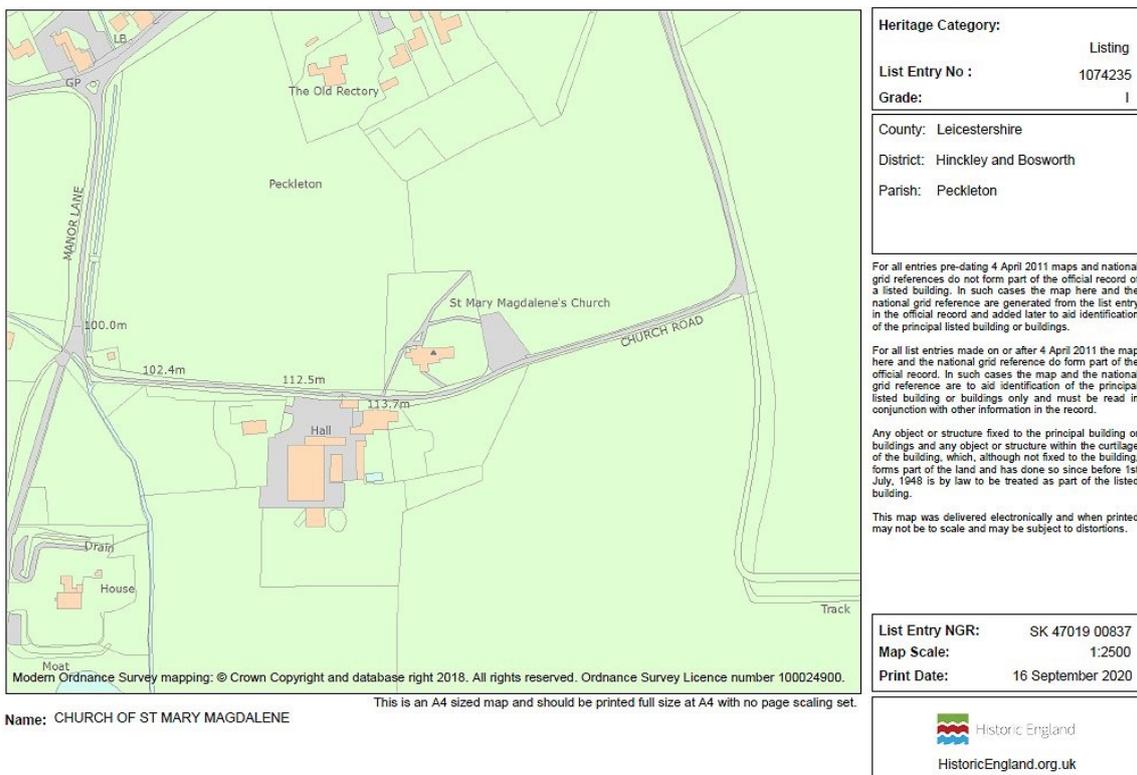


Figure 2. Site Location Plan. Church of St Mary Magdalene named (Source: Historic England).

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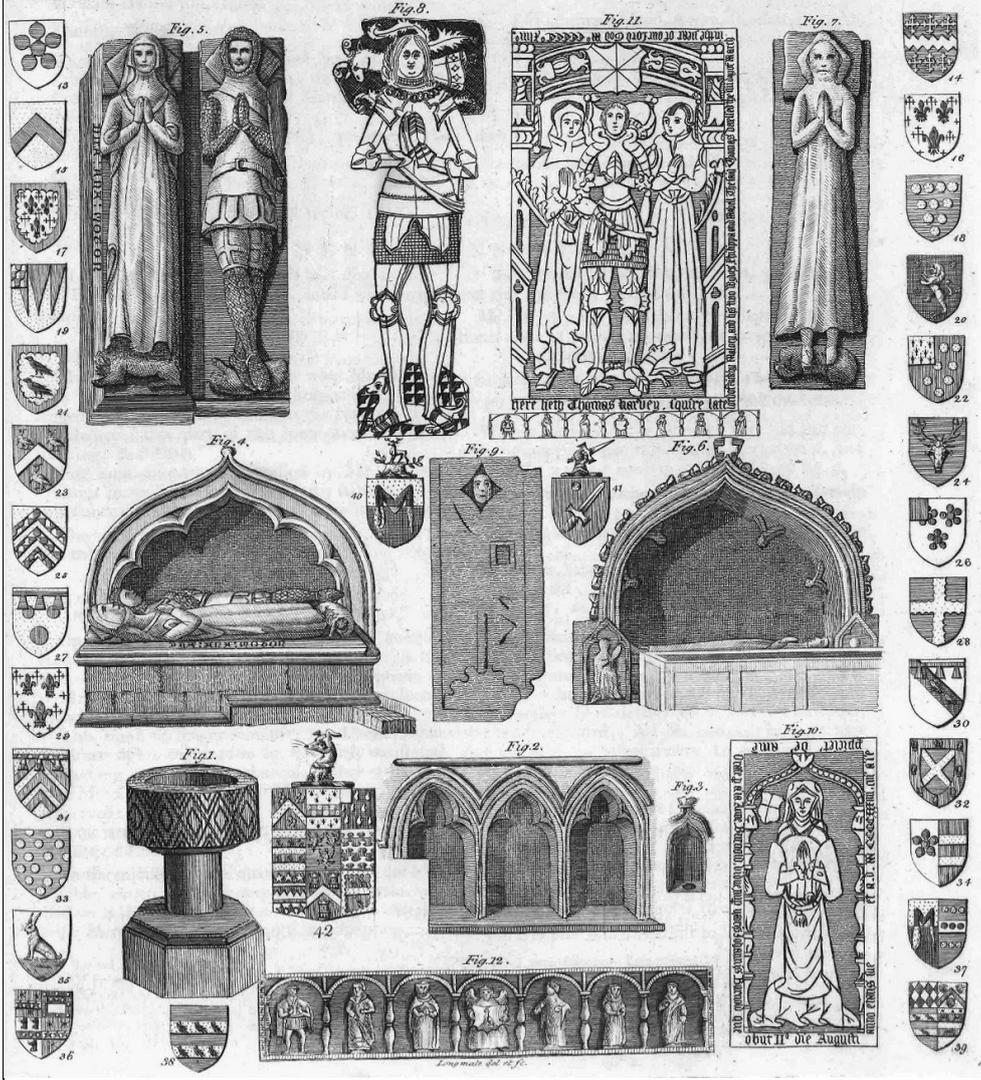


Figure 3. Illustration of Peckleton Church published by Nichols (Nichols 1811, Fig. CXL).

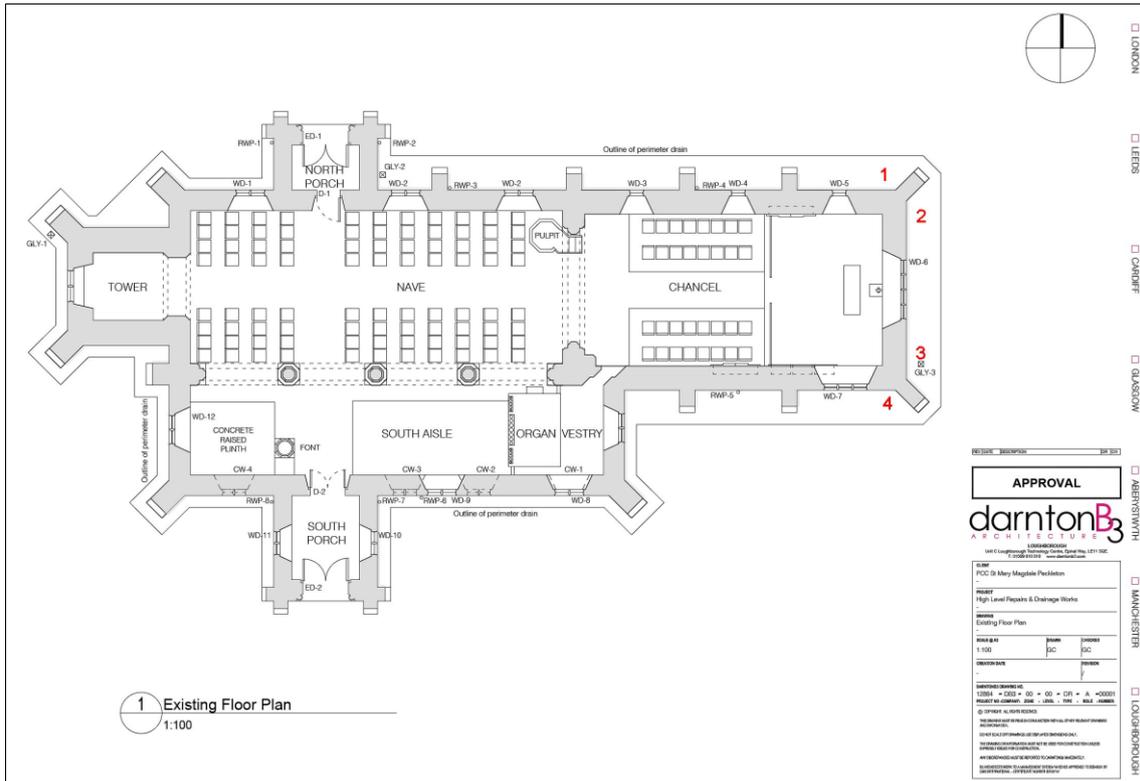


Figure 4. Plan of St Mary Magdalene showing Trial Pit locations in red. After Darnton B3.

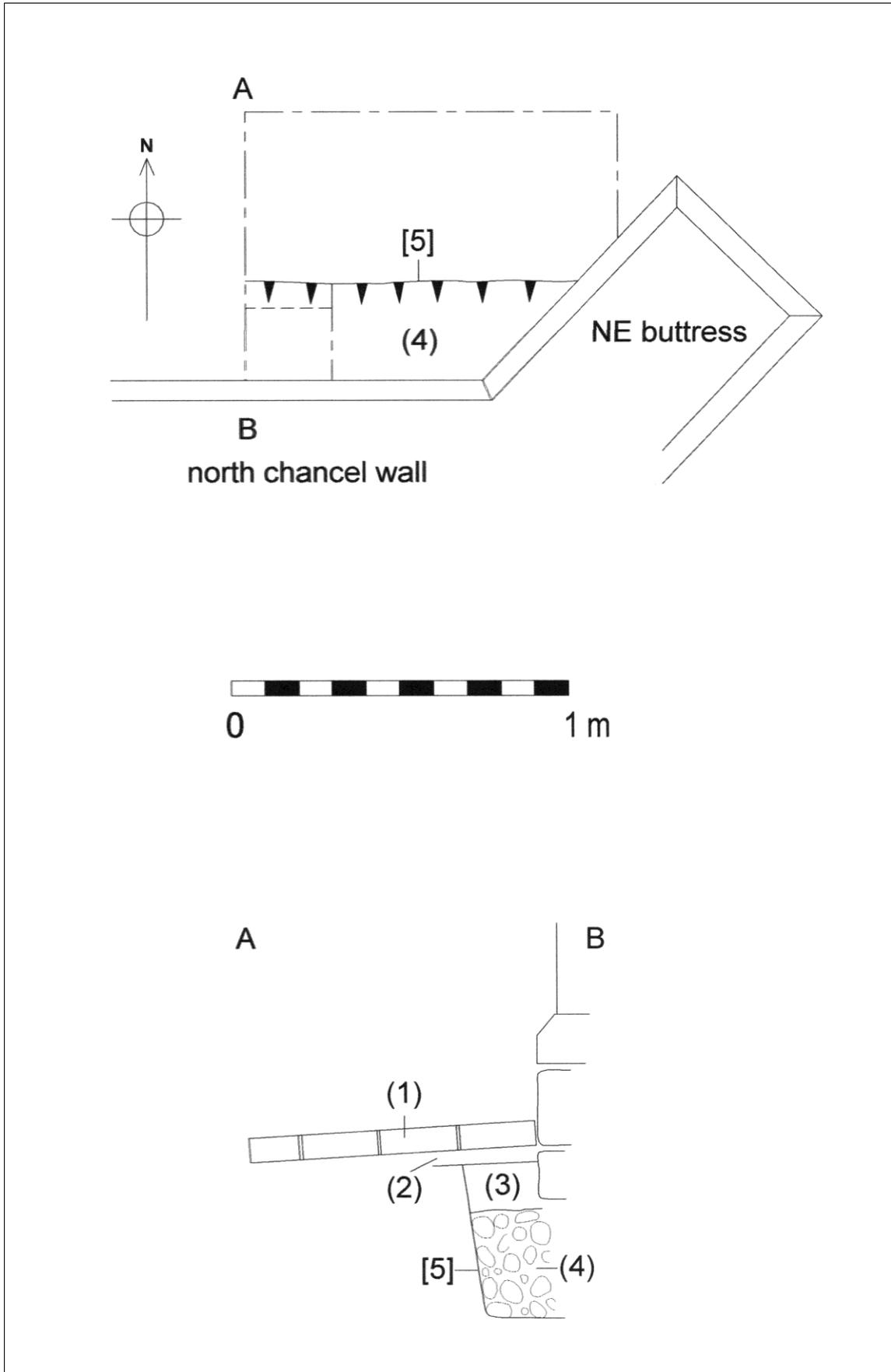


Figure 5. Plan and Section of Trial Pit 1.

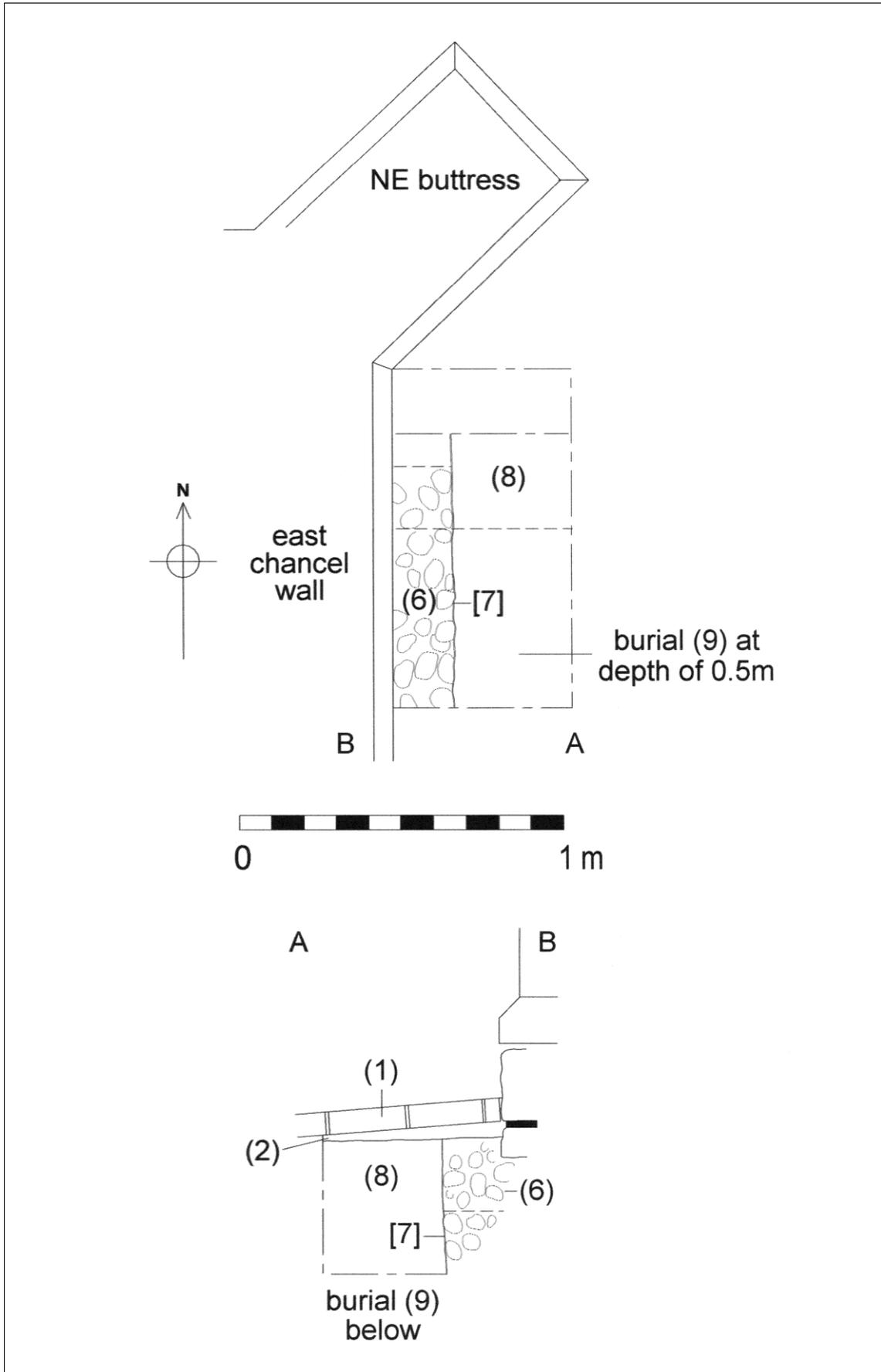


Figure 6. Plan and Section of Trial Pit 2.

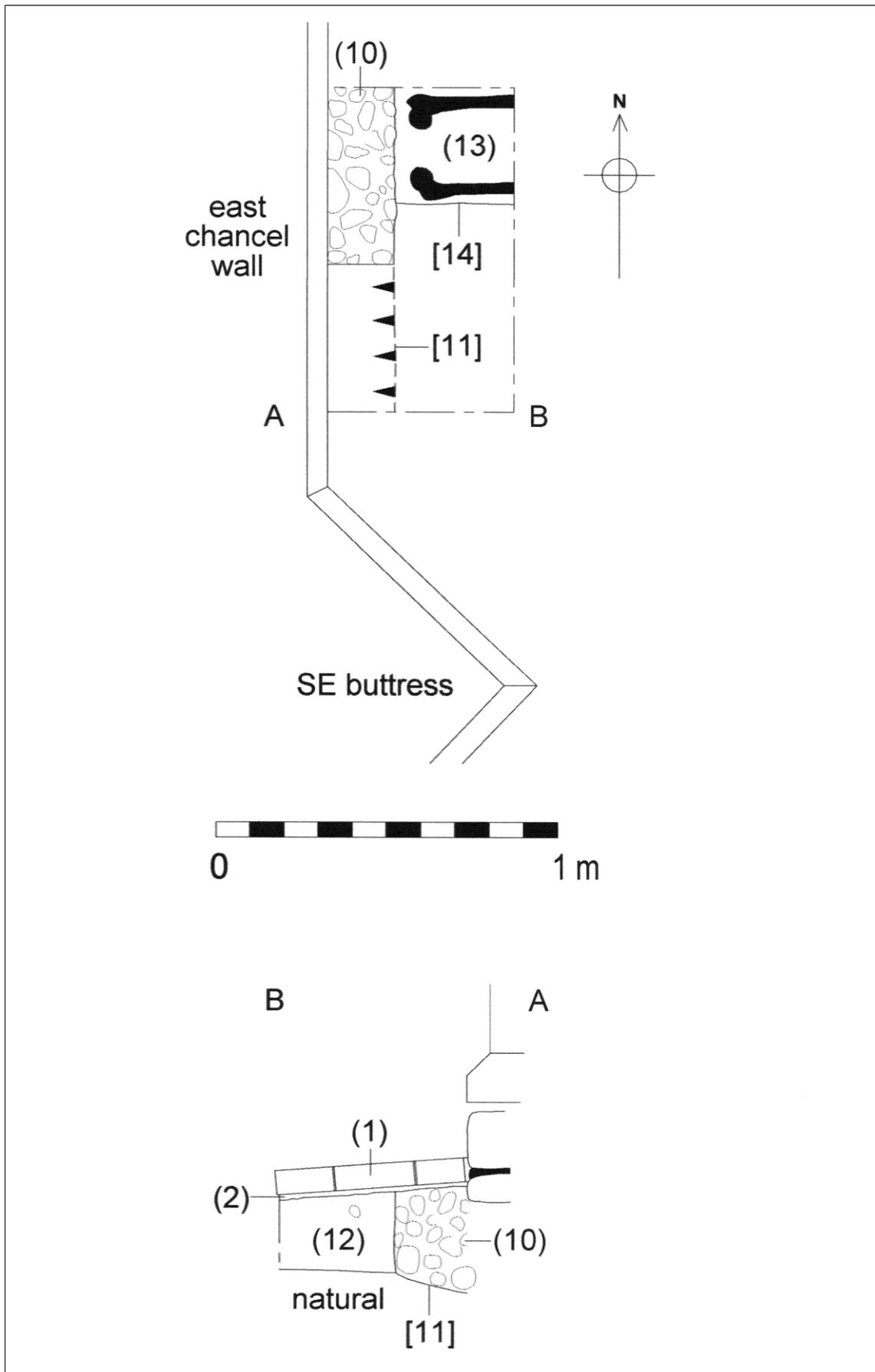


Figure 7. Plan and Section of Trial Pit 3.

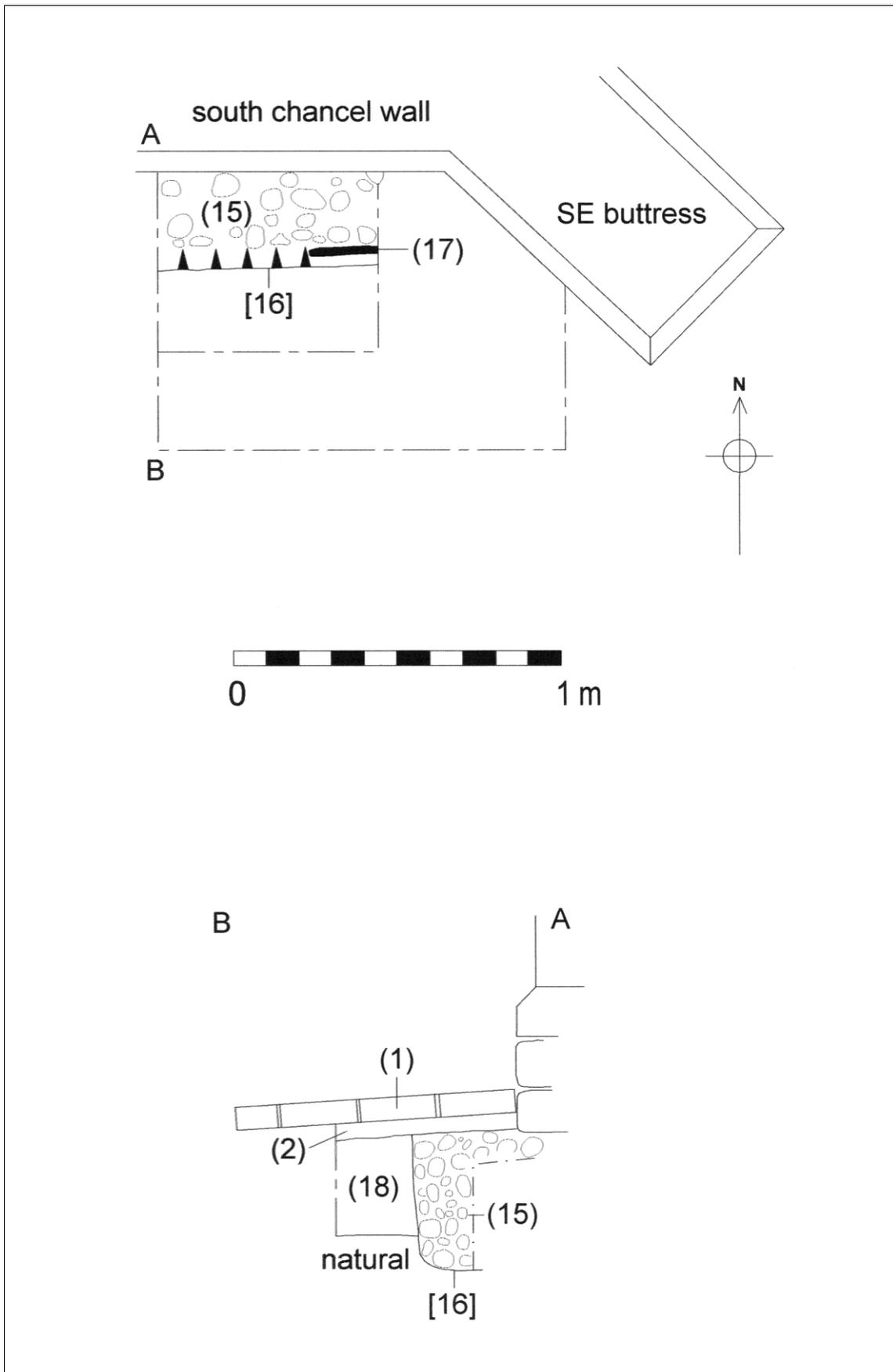


Figure 8. Plan and Section of Trial Pit 4.



Photo 1. Church of St Mary Magdalene, Peckleton, looking NW.



Photo 2. Church of St Mary Magdalene, Peckleton, looking W with chancel in foreground.



Photo 3. General view of Trial Pit 1, looking S. The compacted pebble fill (4) has been excavated, exposing the foundation trench cut [5].



Photo 4. Trial Pit 1, showing lower course of north chancel wall above fill (4) of foundation trench [5], looking S.



Photo 5. General view of Trial Pit 2, looking W.



Photo 6. Trial Pit 2, looking SW with vertical photo scale resting on compacted pebble fill (6) of foundation trench [7]. Burial (9) is not exposed in this shot.



Photo 7. General view of Trial Pit 3, looking W.



Photo 8. Trial Pit 3, looking N showing compacted pebble fill (10) of foundation trench [11] and truncated burial (13) in grave [14].



Photo 9. General view of Trial Pit 4, looking N.



Photo 10. Trial Pit 4, looking NW with scale bar resting on natural clay and foundation trench cut [16] to right of this. A human long bone (17) is within of the partially excavated fill (15).