

# Church of St Mary the Blessed Virgin, Swainswick

## Archaeological Recording of Reordering Works-Phase 1



Prepared February 2021 for

The PCC of St Mary the Blessed Virgin

Carried out by:  
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The photograph on the cover shows “Ladybird” tears on the Cyril Edward Branch (Little Tidules) monument, located on the west facing slopes of the churchyard

## **Church of St Mary the Blessed Virgin, Swainswick**

### Archaeological recording of Reordering Works-Phase 1.

#### **Summary**

The removal of pews in the northern side of the Nave (extending into the North Aisle, Fig. 1)) revealed four 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Bath Stone, Ledger stones. The reordering originally only required the removal of two rows of pews which were going to be replaced with a new stone floor, but due to the unexpected discovery of the ledger stones the rest of the pews in this area were removed.

#### **Location**

The site is located at NGR ST 75652 68417 Upper Swainswick, Innox Lane, Bath, Somerset BA1 8DA.

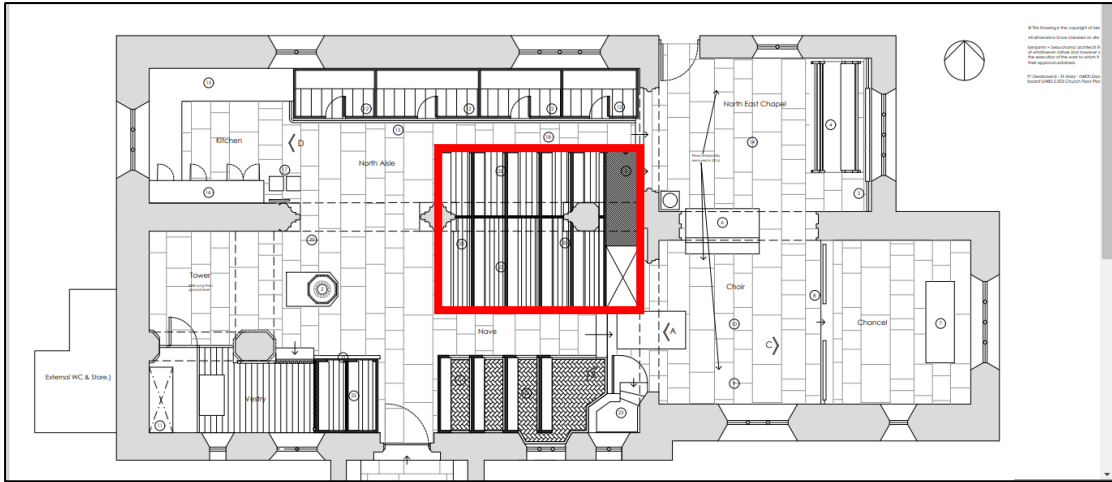
#### **Introduction**

The writer of this document was informed during October 2020 that inscribed stone slabs had been uncovered during the removal of two pews and raised platforms on the north side of the Nave. The works were halted, and the site was subsequently visited on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2020.

Removal of the two rows of pews had exposed the western ends of three substantial stones with a smaller one at the west end of the most northerly one. Two of the stones were located side by side in roughly the centre of the exposed area and the other two formed the north side of the area (Figs 2 & 3). The exposed ends of the stones were seen to protrude between 270mm and 370mm west and could be seen continuing under the existing raised pew platforms.

Exposure of the ledger stones meant that there was a very limited area for the new flooring to be inserted so after discussion with the PCC, the architects and the contractors it was decided to remove the rest of the pews to expose the full extent of the stones so that they could be incorporated into a larger floor area.

The subsequent recording was undertaken between the 29<sup>th</sup> of October and the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.



**Figure 1.** Area of removed pews (after Benjamin & Beauchamp Architects Ltd)



**Figure 2.** Exposed Ledger Stones, central area: facing NE, 1m & 2m scales



**Figure 3.** Exposed Ledger Stones, N side of area: facing E, 1m scales



## Methodology

The dimensions of the remaining pews were recorded and a general photographic record with scales was made prior to their removal.

The SW corner of the area had been reduced to a depth of 450mm prior to the recording in preparation for the new floor surface, but this was backfilled once the full area had been exposed as it became apparent that this amount of soil removal would destabilise the ledger stones and any burial structures below them.

The exposed area comprised of loose soil and blocks of Bath Stone rubble which were removed by hand and the area was levelled to approximately 100mm below the existing Bath Stone flooring.

During these works the top section of the font was dismantled ready to be moved to a new location and an existing heating service pipe was also undergrounded.

The works were recorded by written descriptions; measured sketch plans and sections supplemented by a photographic record using digital photography and appropriate scales.

## Results

- Ledger Stones

The removal of the remaining pews and raised platform over an area 4.8m long E-W and 3.7m wide N-S revealed that the supporting timber joists had been laid directly on top of the ledger stones and rough blocks of Bath Stone and rubble (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4.** Timber joists resting on Ledger Stones: facing NE

The southern half of the area was up to 120mm below the existing floor level and comprised of light brown sandy soil with frequent lumps of lime, small angular rubble,

and occasional human bone and the northern section contained the remains of Bath Stone flooring and a section of concrete (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5.** Remains of Bath Stone flooring & Concrete: facing W, 2m scale

The ledger stones located side by side were of similar dimensions, both measuring 1.53m long x 150mm in thickness, with the most southerly being 840mm wide and the other being 915mm in width (Figs. 6 & 7).

Although not that clear in sections the southern stone was a memorial to Mary Player, eldest sister of William Player of Cleue Hill in the county of Gloucester, who died the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1719 aged 78 years (Fig. 8).

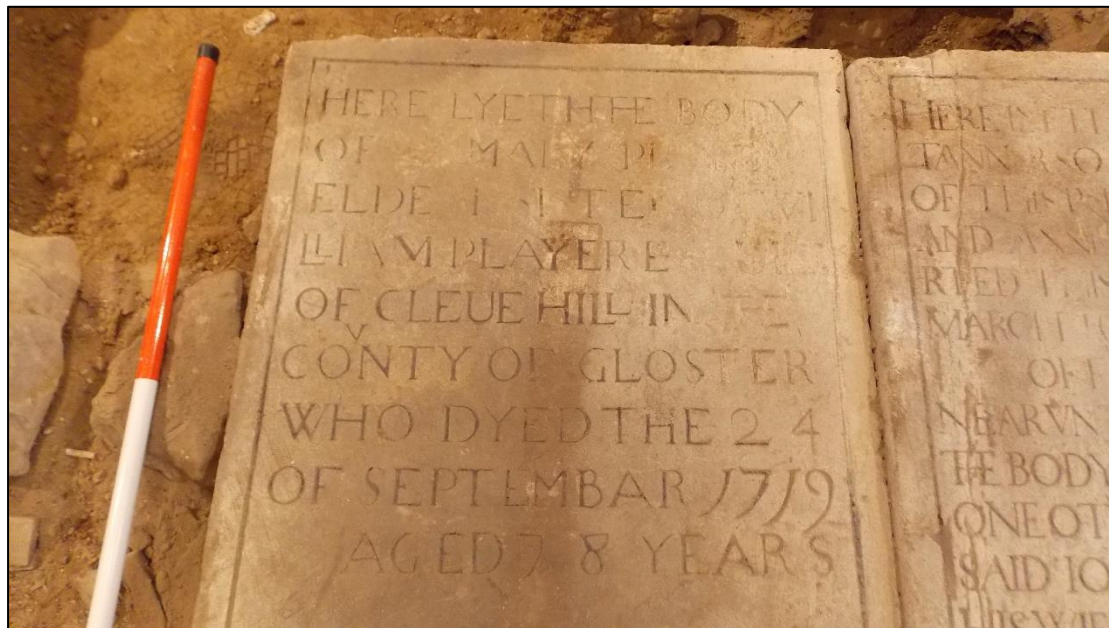


**Figure 6.** Ledger Stones located side by side: facing SW, 1m & 2m scales





**Figure 7.** Ledger Stones located side by side: facing W, 1m & 2m scales



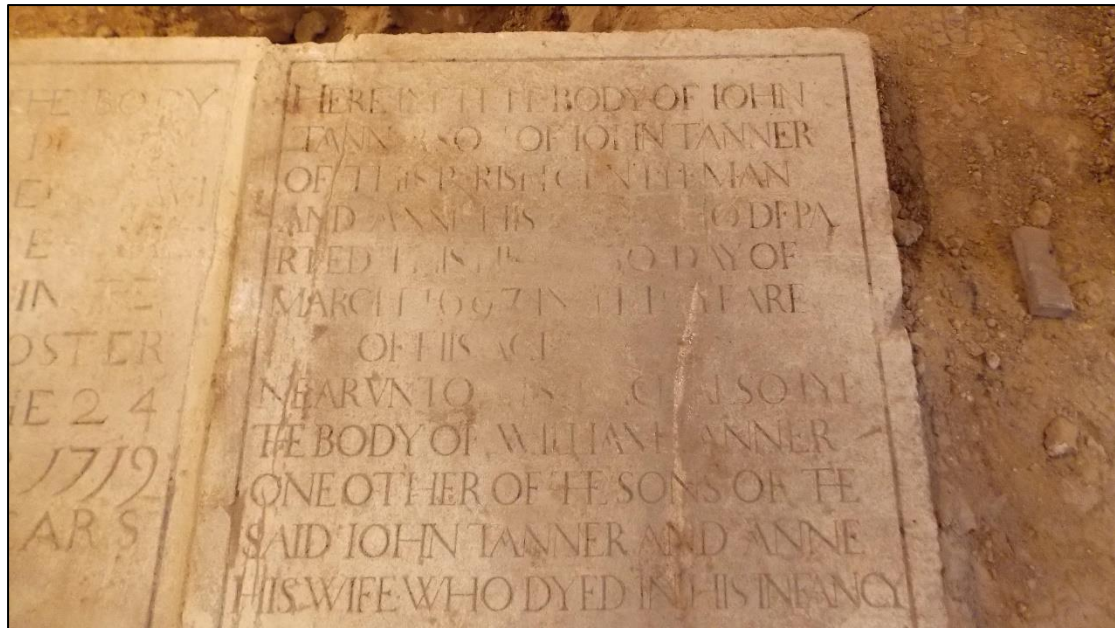
**Figure 8.** Mary Player memorial, 1m scale

The adjoining stone (Figs. 9 & 10) commemorated John Tanner Son of John Tanner of this parish and Anne his wife? Departed March 1697.

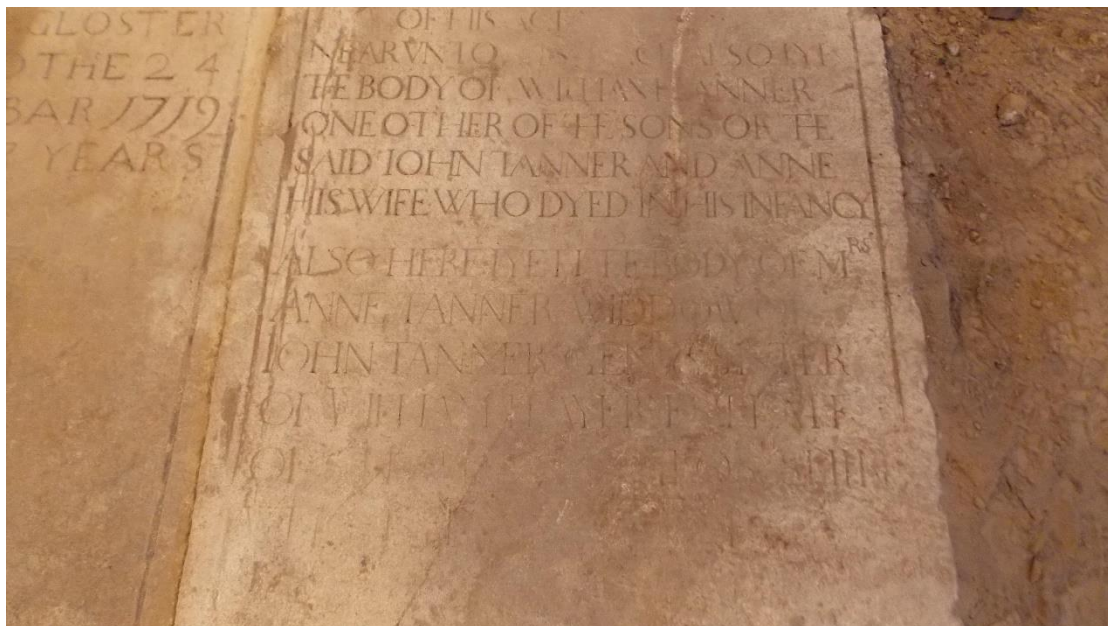
Also the body of William Tanner one other of the sons of John Tanner and Anne his wife who died in his infancy.

Also the body of Mrs Anne Tanner widow of John Tanner, sister? Of William.

The inscriptions are very worn in some areas on this stone, and it is not clear if they relate to individuals below this stone or in close proximity?



**Figure 9.** John Tanner memorial top section



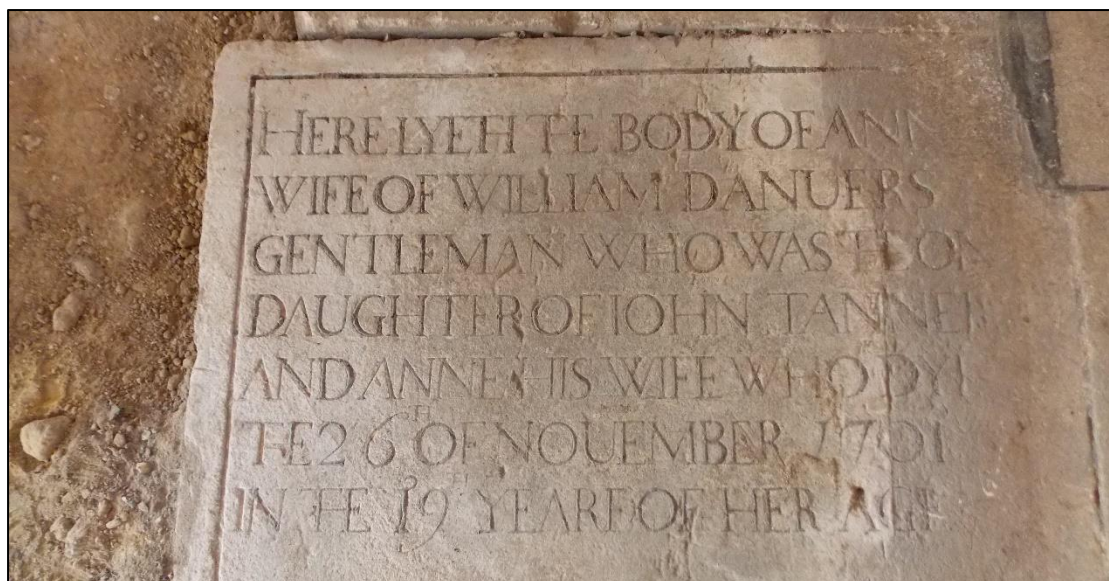
**Figure 10.** John Tanner memorial bottom section

The stone on the north side of the area was again 1.53m long at least 70mm in depth and 910mm wide. The inscription on this one read, Here Lyeth the body of Anne wife of William Danuers Gentleman who was the only daughter of John Tanner and Anne his wife who died the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1701 in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of her age (Fig. 11).

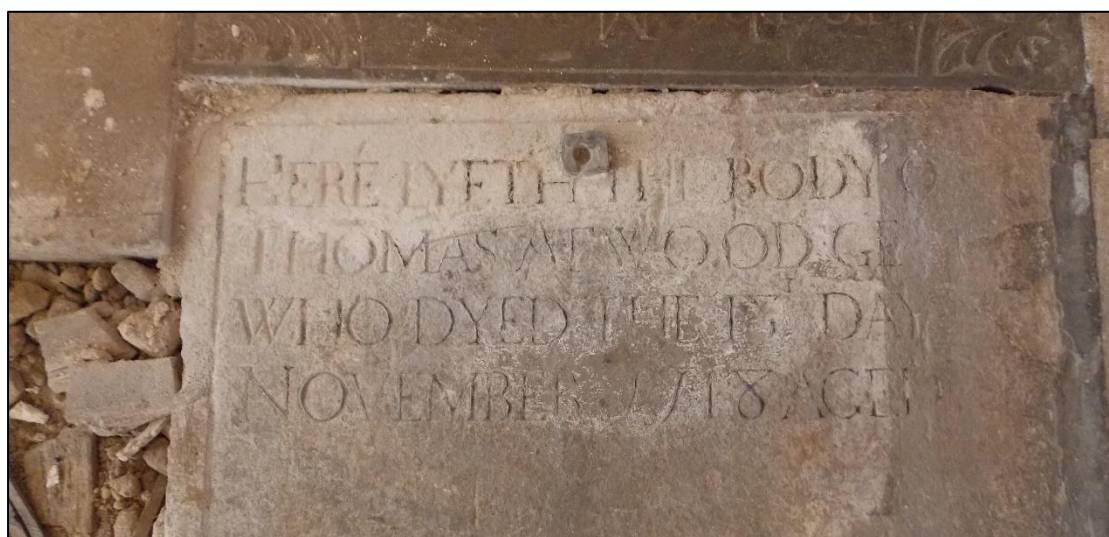
A smaller stone 680mm long, 840mm wide and at least 75mm deep butted the west end of the aforementioned stone. This stone commemorated Thomas Atwood who died the 18<sup>th</sup>? Day of November 1718 aged? (Fig. 12).

The inscriptions on all four of the memorials had been “V” cut into the stones and had then been infilled with a black glass/bitumen material which gave the letters a raised profile (Fig. 13).

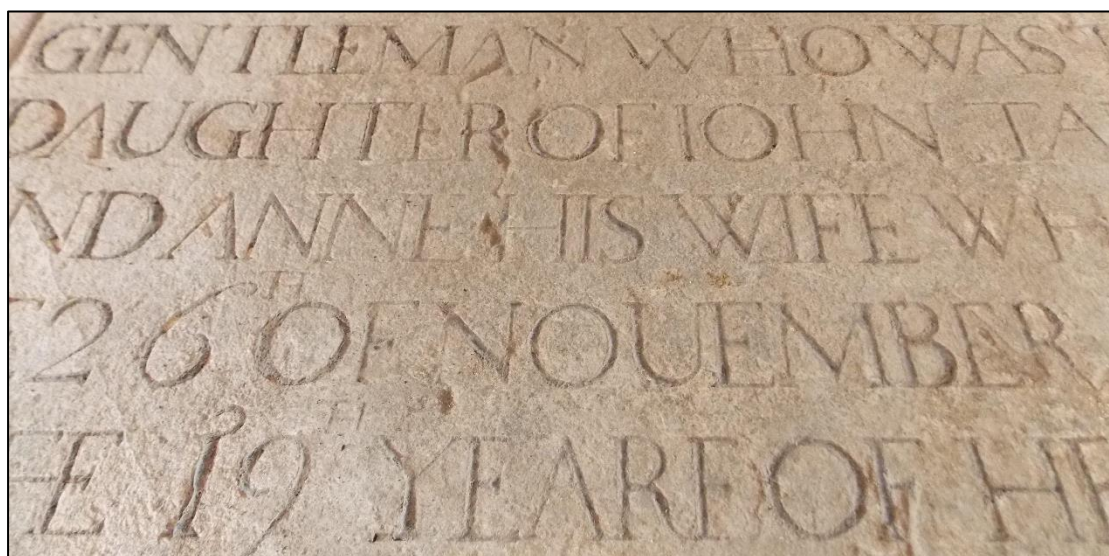




**Figure 11.** Anne Danuers memorial



**Figure 12.** Thomas Atwood memorial



**Figure 13.** Raised infill of inscriptions



The ledger stones were not disturbed further apart from the west end of the one dedicated to Mary Player which had its height adjusted by approximately 50mm to bring it up level with the adjoining stone. This adjustment was achieved by removing some of the loose soil around the exposed end and gently raising it to the required height (Fig. 14) and then constructing a supporting wall underneath (Fig. 15).



**Figure 14.** Raising Ledger Stone to required height: facing E



**Figure 15.** Supporting wall, W end of Ledger Stone: facing E, 1m scale

- Font Dismantling

Part of the reordering works involved relocating the font (Fig. 16) to the south of its present position. The top section was carefully removed by hand using a small lifting device (Fig. 17) and carefully stored ready for its relocation. Removal of this top section revealed that it was bedded on modern cement mortar (Fig.18).

Detailed drawings were not made of the font as these had already been provided by the church's architects.



**Figure 16.** Font location: facing W, 1m & 2m scales



**Figure 17.** Removal of top section of font: facing S



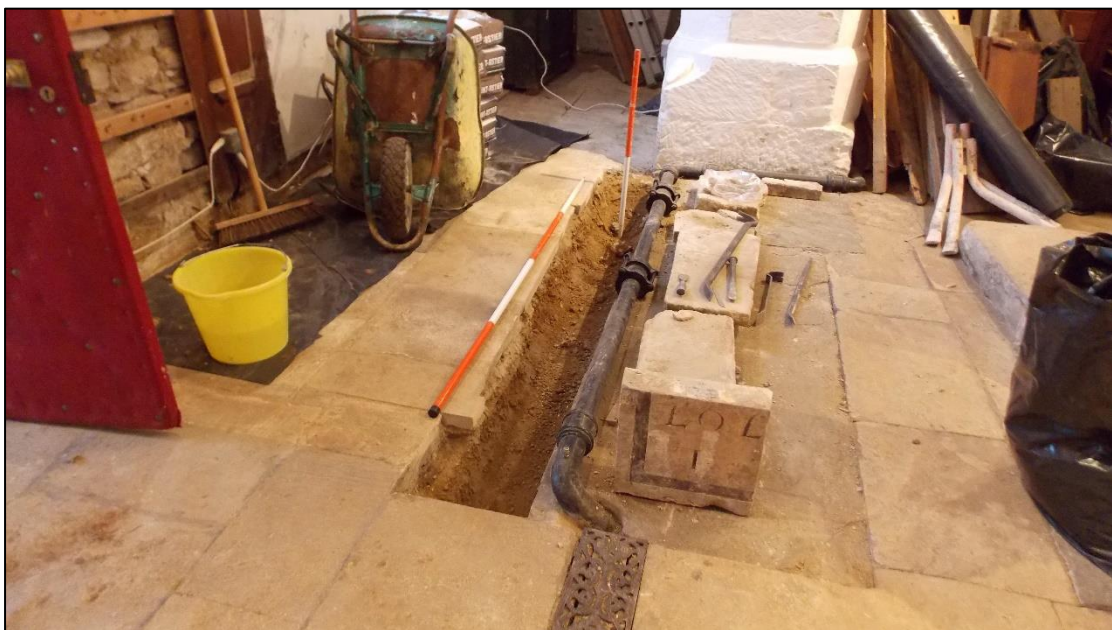


**Figure 18.** Modern cement bedding below top section of font

- Undergrounding of existing service pipe

Existing Bath Stone paving was removed over a 2.6m length to allow a trench to be excavated for an existing cast iron pipe which was above ground, west of the south entrance. The trench was 300mm wide and up to 300mm deep and was excavated through a similar deposit as seen in the main ledger stone area (Fig. 19). The soil in this area contained frequent fragments of human bone, three small fragments of window glass and one sherd of 19<sup>th</sup> Century pottery.

One of the removed Bath Stone floor slabs was seen to be a reused section of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century memorial, the incised letters appeared to have been painted black (Fig. 20). This stone was re-laid into the floor.



**Figure 19.** Excavated trench for existing service pipe: facing W, 1m & 2m scales



**Figure 20.** Reused section of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century memorial stone, 500mm scale

## **Conclusion**

The ledger stones were on a different alignment to the general flooring arrangement within the church but would appear to have formed part of the original floor prior to the construction of the pew platforms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century? It is unclear why they had been aligned slightly off E-W, but this orientation was not changed during these works.

The surviving Bath Stone flooring uncovered in the northern section during the removal of the pews was in a poor state of repair and was very worn and broken in sections and there was no surviving flooring in the southern half of the exposed area. Sections of broken flooring and ledger stones may possibly have been removed during the fitting of the pews. The poor state of the flooring may have been one of the reasons why new pews and platforms were required.

No brick constructed burial vaults were encountered below the exposed ledger stones but if any survive, they are assumed to be at a greater depth than seen during these works. The fragments of human bone exposed during the works were bagged and reburied within the areas they were found.

The memorials dedicated to Thomas Atwood and Anne Danuers were very worn along their north sides where they had not been protected by the pew platform as can be clearly seen in figures, 7, 11 & 12. The PCC have been informed of the fragility of the incised lettering and decoration around the ledger stones and have been advised to use some form of protection if temporary seating is to be placed on them.

Most of the ledger stones within the church appear to be Lias stone or similar, but there are a further four large 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bath Stone Ledgers laid E-W at the east end of the North East Chapel and another laid N-S in the Choir.



The cement mortar seen below the top section of the font would suggest that this has been re-bedded in modern times or relocated to this position.

An area of concrete 1.1m long N-S, 900mm wide E-W was exposed on the north side of the east column in the North Aisle (Fig. 5). This deposit was partially uncovered by the contractors to try and ascertain its depth as the top section needed be removed to allow for the new flooring. It was seen to be at least 450mm in depth, but its function was unclear, it appeared to be butting against the column foundations and a ledger stone to the north (Fig. 21). This deposit may possibly be functioning as a support for an unstable vault below the ledger stone.



**Figure 21.** Exposed section of concrete in North Aisle, 1m scale

### **Acknowledgements**

The writer would like to thank St Marys Church PCC for commissioning him to undertake the archaeological recording. Michael Vaughan (Benjamin & Beauchamp Architects Ltd) and Susanna Watson (PCC) are gratefully acknowledged for coordinating the works.

All the staff from Ellis & Co and the PCC members that I met on site are also thanked for their interest and assistance during the works.

Keith Faxon, February 2021