

Summary

In November 2000 John Samuels Archaeological Consultants excavated the footprint of an extension (to provide a toilet and lobby) to St. Helen's Church, Trowell, Nottinghamshire. The fabric of the existing church was recorded, where a new door was to be inserted through the north wall, as part of the development. This work was conducted on behalf of Forbes R Mutch, Chartered Architect, in accordance with a brief set by the Archaeological Advisor to the Southwell Diocesan Advisory Committee.

A probable Iron Age ditch was identified at the western extent of the site. This provides an important indication of Iron Age activity in Trowell, but little can be said of the feature itself, in the absence of associated features or ground surfaces.

Twelve graves were excavated, together with two pits containing human remains. Many of the graves were difficult to date, because the tops of the grave fills were truncated by landscaping. One gravestone was found within the excavation area, which had been moved. The gravestone was dated to 1799 and is likely to give a good indication of the date of most or all of the inhumations.

The interior and exterior elevation of the blocked doorway in the north wall of the church were drawn and photographed. The triangular headed interior doorway was very different to the exterior doorway, which had a two-centred slightly rounded arch. Both are thought to date to the 14th century AD and the reason for the differing styles was unclear.

Plates were taken both with, and without, photographic scales and include:

- i. Detail of external elevation
- ii. Detail of internal elevation
- iii. General views of the exterior of the building
- iv. Overall appearance of the interior of the building

4.3 The project archive will follow the guidelines contained in "*Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for long term storage*" (UKIC 1990) and "*Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections*" (Museums and Galleries Commission 1992)

4.4 Copies of the report will be sent to the client, the Parochial Church Council, the diocese of Southwell, the Archaeological Advisor to the Diocesan Advisory Committee, the Senior Archaeologist for Nottinghamshire and to the County Sites & Monuments Record.

4.5 All work was undertaken with respect to health and safety provision. Hard hats and hi-visibility jackets were worn at all times and spoil was kept at a safe distance from the trench edge.

5.0 Results of the excavation (Figures 4 and 5)

Natural

5.1 The earliest deposit found within the excavation area was the natural geology, 61. This was exposed at a depth of 1.55 m below the current ground surface in the area of deepest excavation, which was for the cesspool, at the western extent of the site. Deposit 61 was mid orange brown silty clay, with mid blue-grey lenses. This deposit is considered to be the Dale association (712a), which is described as Carboniferous and Jurassic clay and shale (SSEW 1983).

5.2 A dark brown loamy silt layer 59, was interpreted as a possible buried ground surface. Although no direct relationship was found between this layer and deposit 61, the fact that this layer was derived from natural reworking of deposit 61 shows it to be later. Layer 59 was overlain by a mid to dark brown gritty clay silt layer, 04, which was similar to layer 59.

Probable Iron Age ditch

- 5.3 The earliest feature found within the excavation area was a probable Iron Age ditch, 51. This north-west - south-east aligned ditch cut layer 04, at the western extent of the area. It was 1.54 m wide and 0.75 m deep, with steep, slightly concave sides and a concave base. The ditch was filled with mid to dark grey brown fine loamy silt, 52 with occasional small sub-rounded stone inclusions. This fill was almost certainly derived from the natural, 04, into which the feature was cut. It could represent redeposited bank material, although no evidence was found to suggest on which side of the ditch, the bank was constructed. It was not clear how long the ditch may have stood open for, partially because the upper fill of the ditch was truncated by cut 62. Two conjoining sherds (59 g) of Iron Age pottery was recovered from the fill. Although this is not sufficient to date the fill with total certainty, the size of the sherds and the lack of obvious contamination suggests that this date is reasonably secure. The ditch was cut by graves 30, 33, 36, 41, 42, 56 and pit 47.

Graves

- 5.4 The only dating evidence recovered from the excavated graves came from the fill of grave 05. The remainder were undated and because the tops of the grave cuts were truncated by cut 62 they were difficult to phase. As would be expected in a churchyard, all of the graves were aligned east-west and contained inhumations without grave goods.

Graves and pits containing human remains at the western extent of the site

- 5.5 All of the graves and the pit were cut into the fill, 52 of the probable Iron Age ditch 51, with the exception of grave 24, which cut the layer of disturbed natural, 04 and graves 27 and 53, which cut other graves.
- 5.6 Grave 33 was only partially exposed. It contained a semi-articulated adult left leg, 35. The grave was backfilled with dark brown fine clay silt, 34.
- 5.7 Grave 36 was heavily disturbed by graves 30, 39 and 42. It contained the lower legs of an adult, 38 sealed beneath dark brown fine clay loamy silt, 37.
- 5.8 Pit 47 appeared to have been cut for the re-interment of at least two adult skulls, 45 and 46. The skulls were sealed by dark brown clay loam, 48. This feature is likely to have been cut to hold human remains disturbed by later burials.
- 5.9 Grave 30 cut grave fills, 34 and 37. The grave contained the fully articulated remains of a young child, 32 which was buried within a coffin. Small pieces of iron coffin fittings were found around the skeleton. The coffin was sealed by dark brown fine clay silt, 31.
- 5.10 Graves 39, 42 and 56 were cut by grave 53. Grave 39 contained an adult skull, 41 sealed beneath dark brown loamy silt, 40. Grave 42 contained a complete, articulated adult

*Archaeological Report on the Excavation and Standing Building Recording at:
St. Helen's Church, Trowell, Nottinghamshire (Diocese of Southwell).*

skeleton, 44 minus the feet and lower legs, sealed by dark brown clay loam, 43. Grave 56 contained a single cranial fragment, 58, sealed by dark brown loamy silt, 57. Grave 53 contained an adult skull, 55, the remainder of the body was outside of the impact of development. The grave was backfilled with dark brown loamy silt, 54.

- 5.11 Grave 24 extended beneath the south-western corner of the excavation area. It contained the skull and partially articulated right arm of an adult, 26. The human remains were sealed by dark brown fine clay silt, 25. Grave 27 cut grave fill 25. Grave 27 contained the pelvis and articulated lower body of an adult, 29, which was sealed by dark brown fine clay silt, 28.

Graves and pits containing human remains at the eastern extent of the site

- 5.12 All of the graves were observed as they cut layer 59. Pit 22 was seen to cut the layer of disturbed natural, 04.
- 5.13 Pit 22 extended beneath the eastern edge of the site. The pit contained a fragment of lower jaw, 12, two skulls, 13 and 14 and a skull with the top three cervical vertebrae, 15. A number of disarticulated bones were also found within the dark brown fine clay silt backfill, 23, above the skeletal material. This feature is likely to have been cut to hold human remains disturbed by later burials.
- 5.14 Grave 20 contained a fully articulated adult skeleton, 17, minus the lower legs. The skeleton was sealed by dark brown fine clay silt backfill, 21.
- 5.15 Grave 18 contained a fully articulated adult skeleton, 16, sealed by mid to dark brown fine clay silt backfill, 19.

Landscaping

- 5.16 The fills of all of the aforementioned graves were truncated by cut 62. This cut levelled all deposits between the boundary wall of the graveyard and the northern wall of the church, with the exception of a corridor, measuring 1.2 m in width from the northern wall of the church. The reason for levelling the ground surface around the church was not clear, particularly because the ground was subsequently built up. The truncation of the previous ground surface onto layer 04 was especially apparent in the northern section of the deep excavation for the cesspool, where the probable Iron Age ditch and grave 24 appeared to be cut from the same level. Layer 03 a mid red brown fine silty loam was deposited above cut 62.

Grave 05

- 5.17 Grave 05 was the only grave seen to cut layer 03. The grave extended beneath the eastern edge of the site. It contained the articulated body of an adult, 11, the skull and shoulders

of which were within the excavation area. The skeleton was sealed by mixed, but predominantly mid yellowish brown silty clay 06. A sherd of medieval pottery (13th century?) was recovered from the grave fill, which was residual.

Landscaping

- 5.18 Layer 63 was a very dark grey fine silty loam, topsoil like material, which sealed grave fill 06. This was overlain by a layer of dark grey black gritty clay loam, 60 which was the result of disturbance of layer 63 during the construction of a concrete drain around the north wall of the church.

Headstone 02

- 5.19 A blue grey slate headstone, 02 was found 0.4 m east of the western edge of the site, within the topsoil. It was 1.69 m long, 0.56 m wide and 0.04 m deep. The inscription, carved by Bradlow, read,

"Here lieth in hope of a blessed immortality the remains of Ruth. Wife of Samuel Simpson, Daughter of John and Elizabeth Sison who died 21st March 1799. Aged 22 years. O' cruel death that would not be denied, that breaks the bands of love, so lately tied, in little thought death would have called too soon, but it was night before I thought of noon, I did just step one foot upon the stage to view the scenes of this deplored age, the wise disposer thought it best for me to leave this world, a better world to see."

- 5.20 The headstone was approximately above grave 42, but there was no sign of a grave cut when the headstone was raised, due to the truncation by cut 62. The headstone had therefore definitely been moved, but it is possible that it was replaced on the approximate spot that it was moved from and may therefore relate to grave 42.
- 5.21 The whole excavation area was covered with a layer of dark grey black fine silty loam topsoil, 01.

6 Results of the standing building recording (Figure 3)

- 6.1 The internal and external elevations of the blocked doorway in the north wall of the church were drawn to scale (Figure 3). Neither Pevsner (1979) nor the current guidebook to the church (Cook 1999) discuss the doorway in the north wall, which is noteworthy only in as much as the doorway is very unusual. Within the church, the doorway is triangular-headed, with what appears to be two keystones. This doorway is 1.2 m wide and 2.8 m high. Externally the doorway had a two-centred, slightly rounded arch with a rounded hood moulding. This was 1 m wide and 2 m high. The difference in height between the two doorways reflects the step into the church. Both doorways are likely to date to the 14th century AD remodelling. It is not clear why such different styles should

have been used for the internal and external elevations. The date of the blocking of the doorway is also unknown.

- 6.2 The external elevation of the north wall of the church was almost certainly restored, together with the tower walls in 1956.
- 6.3 The foundations beneath the doorway were exposed to a depth of 50.595 m AOD, these, too, were unusual. Substantial, well coursed, foundations were found immediately beneath the doorway, but these appeared to become less deliberately placed and less substantial to the west, with movement towards the tower. The reason for this, if it was deliberate, was not clear.
- 6.4 The fabric of the north wall of the church is Trowell sandstone.

7 Discussion

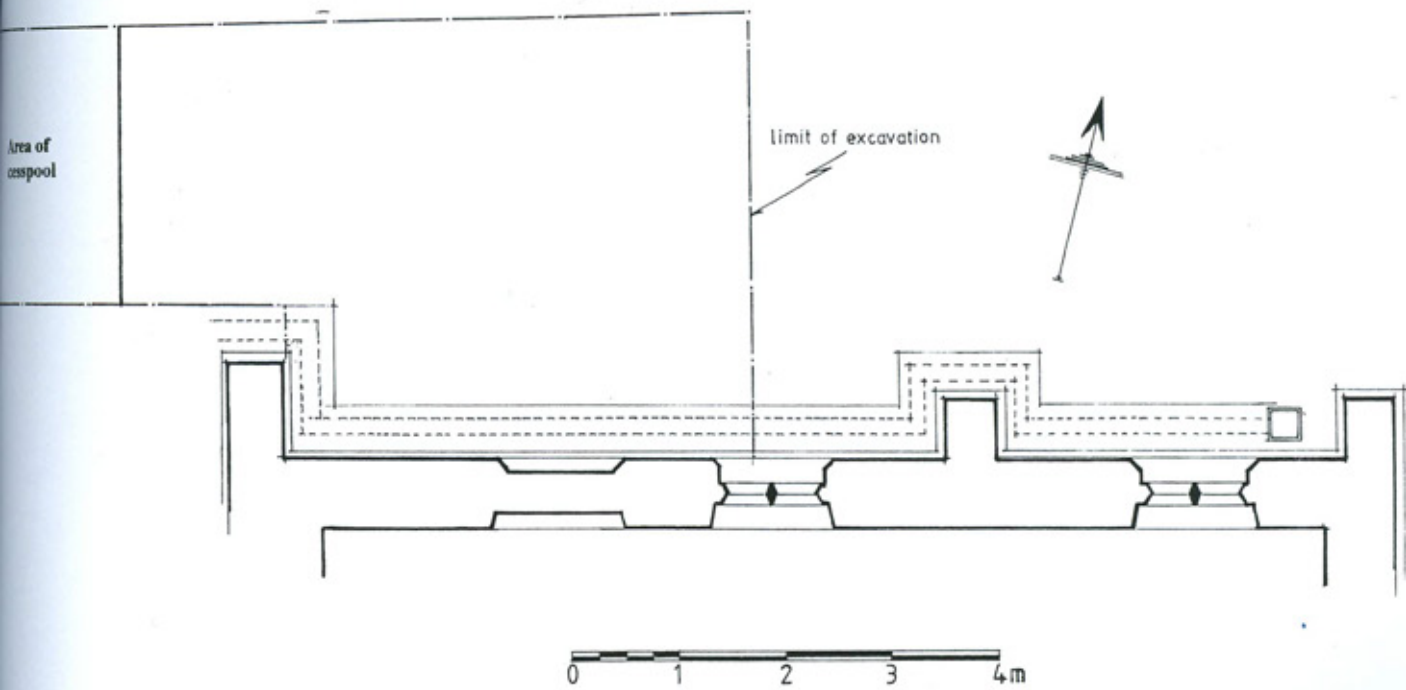
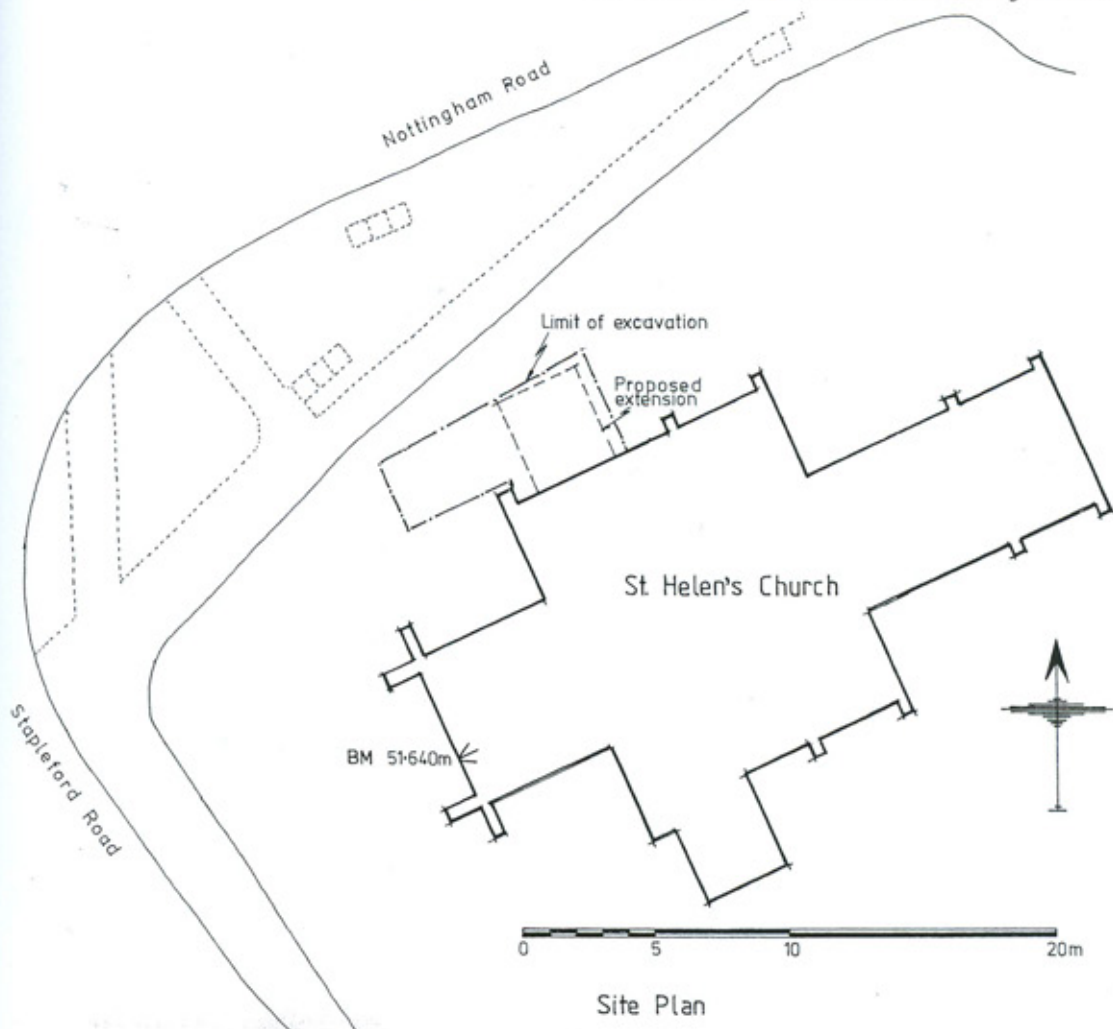
- 7.1 The discovery of a probable Iron Age ditch during the excavation was unexpected. The ditch is not absolutely securely dated, given that only one sherd, albeit fairly large was recovered from the feature. The presence of the sherd itself however is good evidence for an Iron Age presence in the vicinity, and it is very likely, given the lack of sources of contamination that the ditch was of Iron Age date. The original ground surface that the feature was cut through was removed by cut 62, so the original depth of the ditch is not clear. The fact that it survived to a depth of 0.7 m and that it had a broad profile may suggest that it was originally a substantial feature, but this is not certain. It could be a boundary or drainage feature, but without other features of similar date to relate it to, interpretation of the feature is very difficult.
- 7.2 Ursilla Spence, Senior Archaeologist for Nottinghamshire conducted an SMR search for Iron Age sites following a request for such information from JSAC. Evidence for Iron Age activity is concentrated on the Trent gravels, from sites such as Gonalston and Gamston. Outside of those concentrations there is a thin spread of material from across the county, totalling 313 SMR entries. This picture is probably slightly skewed by the fact that many sites listed as Romano-British may have had Iron Age antecedents. The SMR does not include recent evaluation work, which will further distort the picture.
- 7.3 A find of Romano-British, or earlier, pottery from the border of Trowell and Shelley (NGR 5081 4148 (SMR 5266)) provides the nearest recorded possible Iron Age evidence to the ditch at St. Helen's, Trowell.
- 7.4 The discovery of the probable Iron Age ditch at Trowell adds an important qualifier to the picture of activity in that period derived from cropmark sites, particularly on the gravels. The nature of historical development of areas such as Trowell means that significant evidence has probably been lost and extant evidence can only be found by intrusive

investigation.

- 7.5 The truncation of the graves by cut 62 made phasing many of them very difficult. It also made it difficult in the field to assess what level to record the bodies to, given that dating the bodies was impossible. All bodies were therefore recorded on skeleton recording sheets and the skeletons were planned, with measurements for major bones. All of the bodies had been buried accorded to Christian practice east-west, with the head facing toward the west. The only exceptions to this were pits 22 and 47, which appeared to have been cut for the re-interment of human remains disturbed during the digging of graves.
- 7.6 Only one headstone was found within the site, which had been moved, but may have related to grave 42. The date of that headstone, 1799, may give a good indication of the date of all of the graves, with the exception of grave 05, which may have been slightly more recent.
- 7.7 The re-interment of the human remains means that the features relating to the use of the site as a churchyard are of little or no archaeological interest. It should be noted that there were further inhumations below the impact level reached across the site, with the exception of the area of the cesspool, which was excavated through sterile natural.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The probable Iron Age ditch, which may have been a boundary or drainage feature, does not in itself provide significant information about life in Trowell in the Iron Age. There are no other features with which to relate the ditch, and the ground surface, through which the ditch was cut, has been lost. The importance of the ditch, or at least the discovery of Iron Age pottery, is to add a useful qualifier to the picture of Iron Age activity in Nottinghamshire, derived from excavations on cropmark and especially gravel sites. The historical development of urban centres in Nottinghamshire has destroyed substantial amounts of archaeological evidence and it is likely that some of that evidence would have been for Iron Age activity. There is an imbalance in the evidence for Iron Age activity, between modern urban and rural areas. This imbalance is heightened by the nature of modern development, in particular extensive gravel extraction, and by modern archaeological techniques, particularly non-intrusive surveying. Nottinghamshire's churchyards undoubtedly contain important information relating to prehistoric activity, particularly within the urban centres of the county, that may have been lost due to the nature of urban development elsewhere.
- 8.2 The graves that were excavated have little or nothing of archaeological significance.
- 8.3 The interior elevation of the blocked doorway, within the north wall, has an unusual triangular apex. The interior elevation was also very different to the exterior elevation. The reason for this is unclear. Both are thought to date to the 14th century AD.



Plan showing north wall and area of excavation for extension

Figure 2: Site plan and plan showing north wall and area of excavation

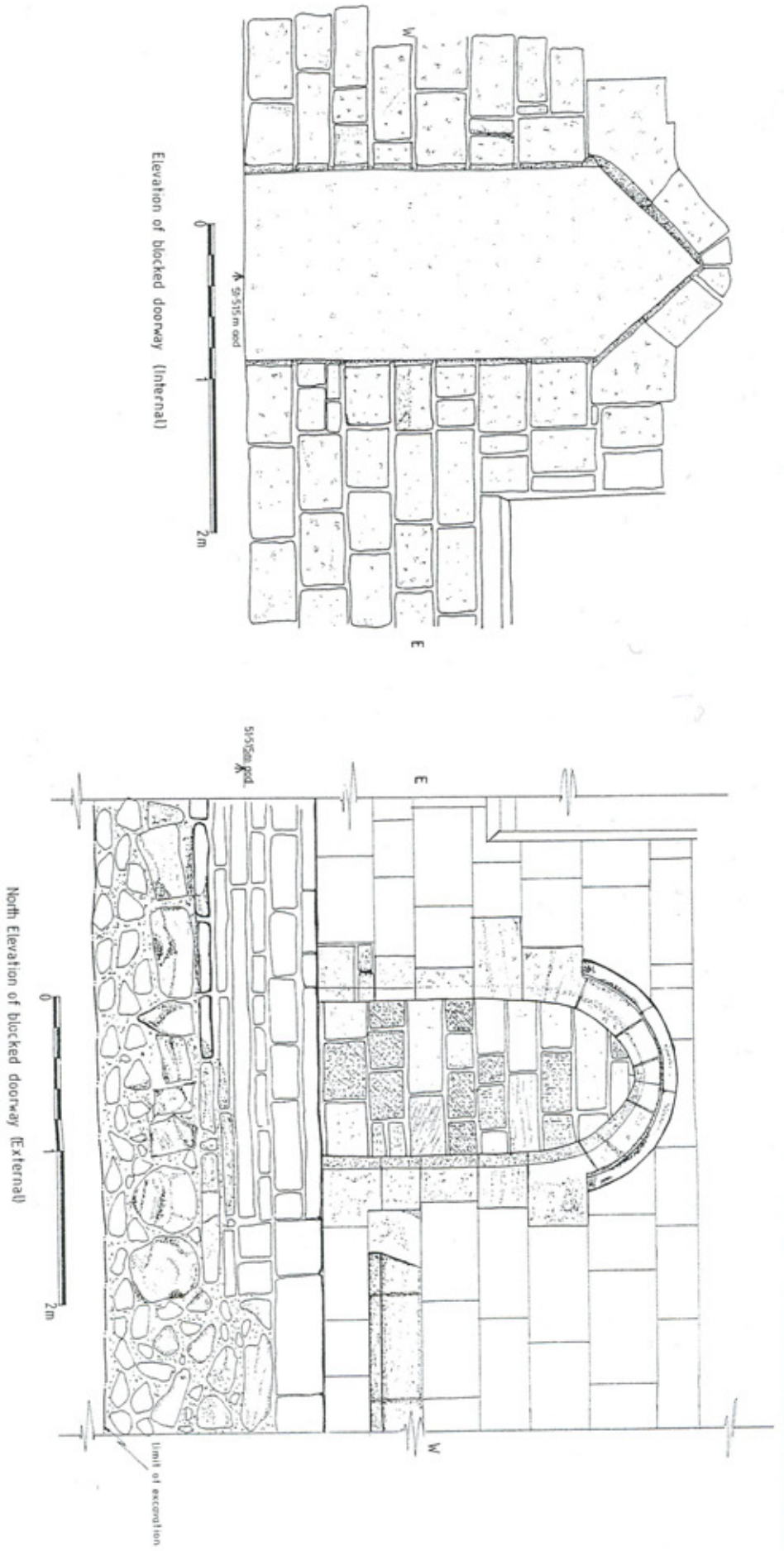
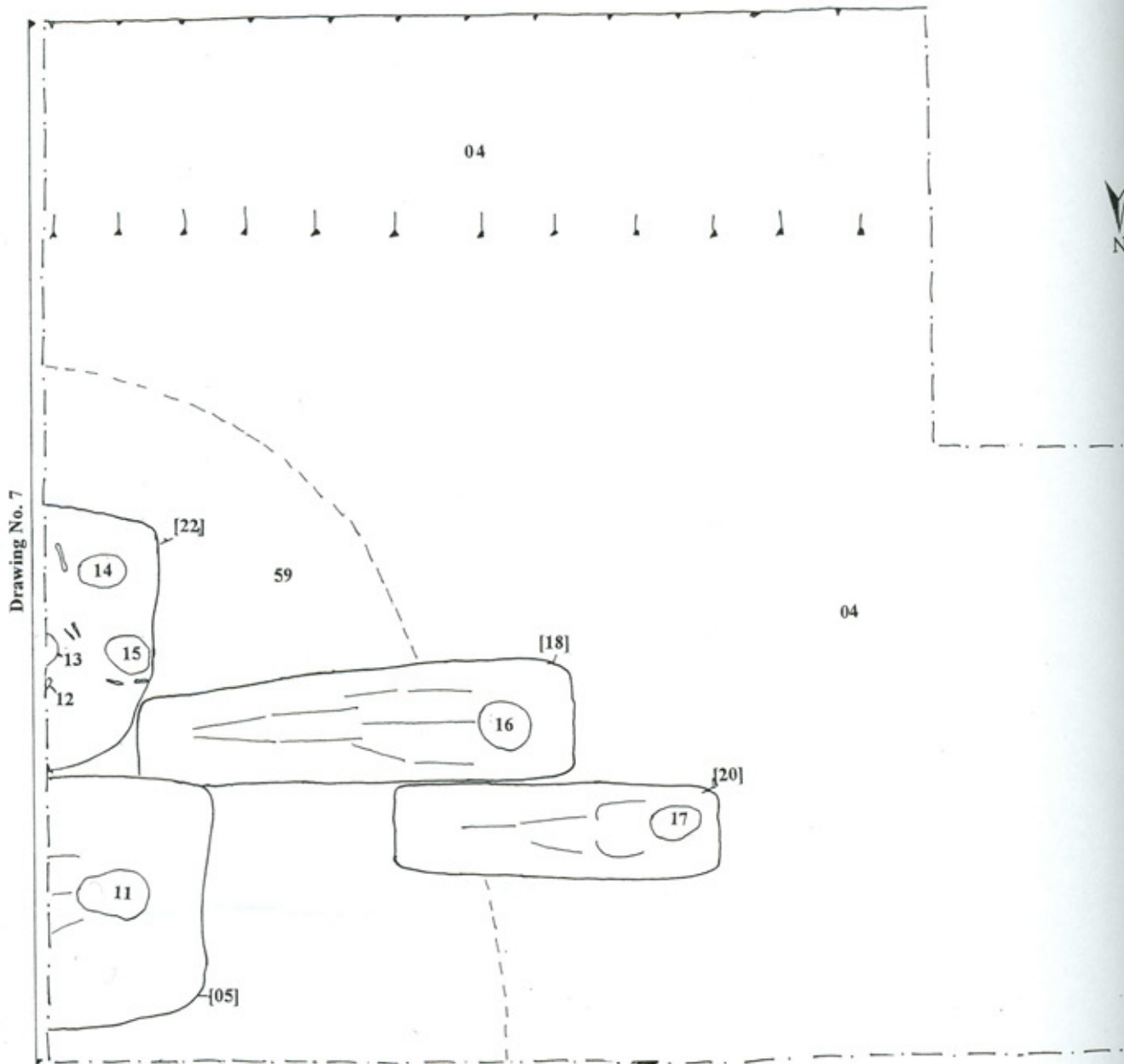
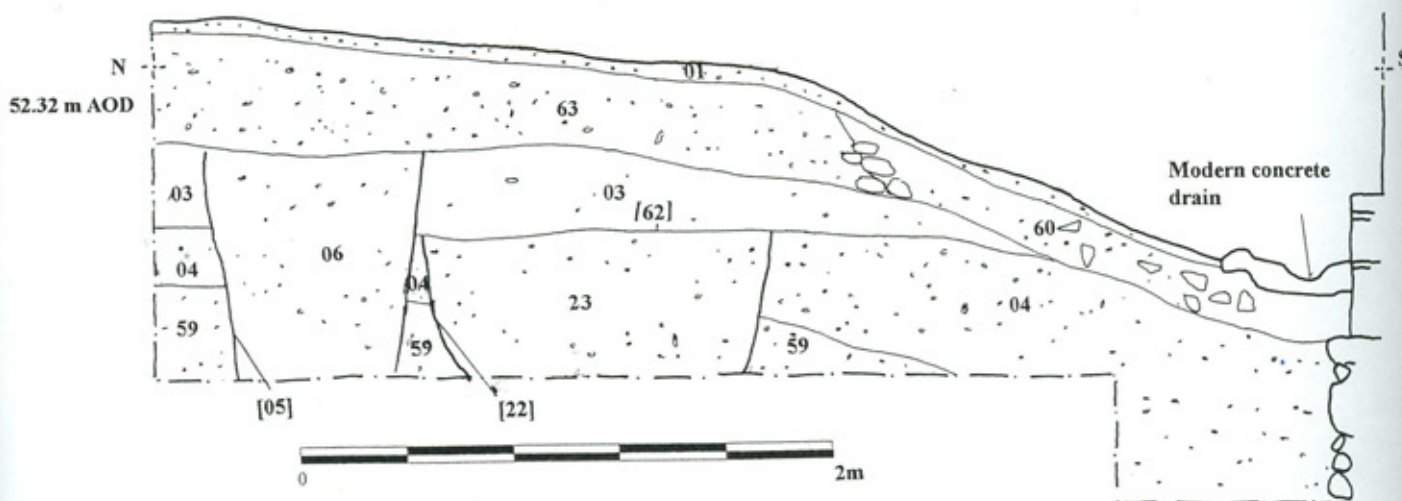


Figure 3: Internal and external elevation of blocked doorway in north wall



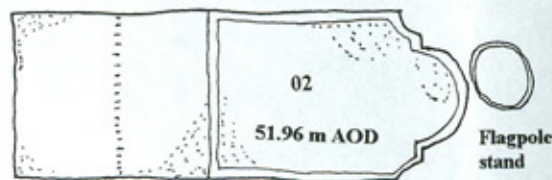
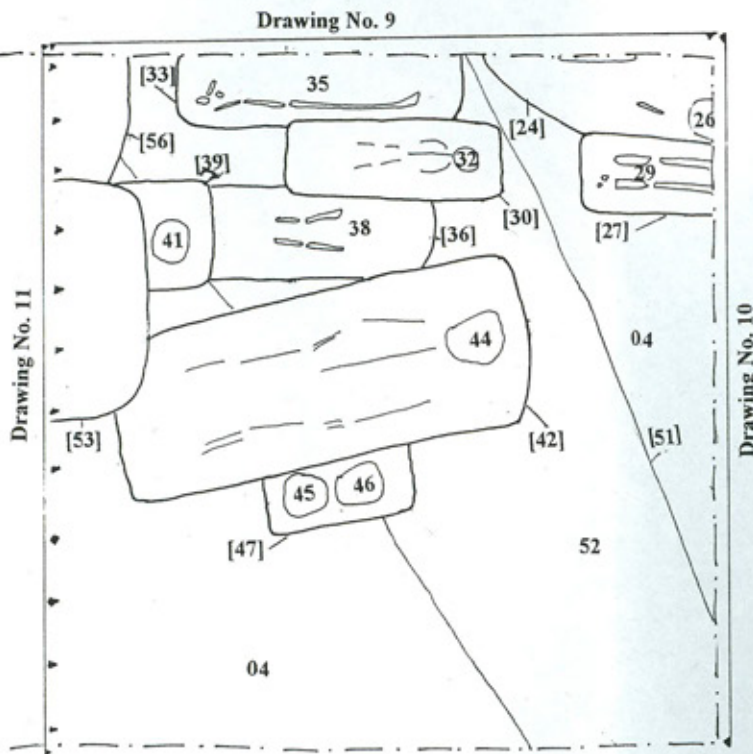
Overall site plan showing all excavated graves and Ditch 51



Drawing 7: East section of excavation

Table of OD heights on skulls
 or highest surviving bone
 (In the absence of skulls)

Skeleton number	Height of skull (mAOD)
11	51.37
12	50.56
13	51.29
14	51.34
15	50.79
16	51.12
17	51.22
26	51.29
29	50.79
32	50.96
35	51.06
38	50.89
41	50.97
44	50.9
45/46	50.93
55	50.8
58	50.8



01

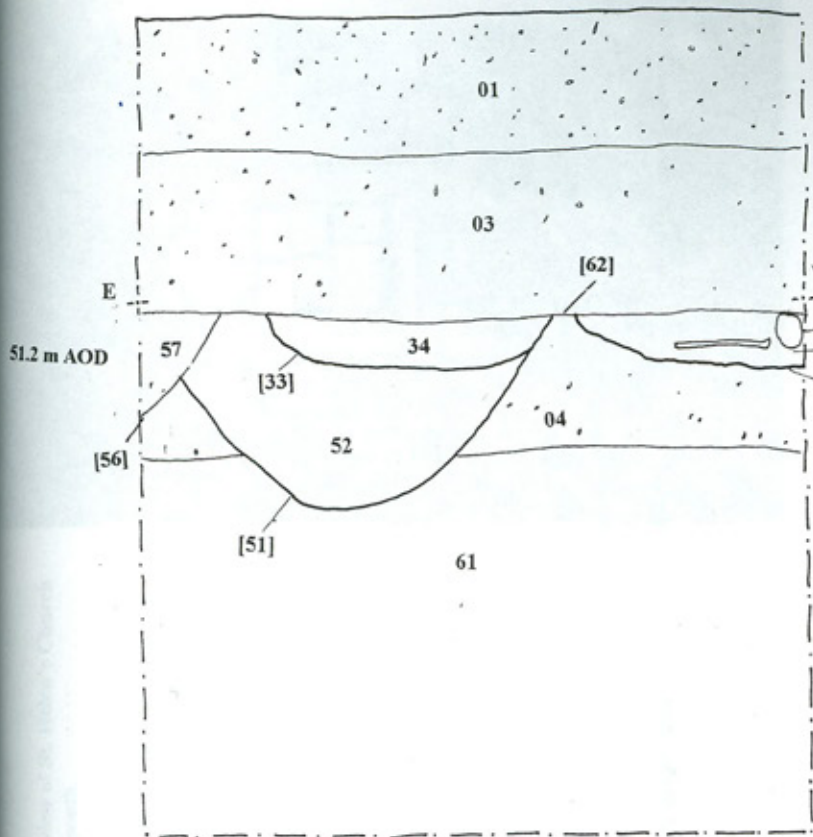


Overlay to site plan
 showing location of gravestone 02

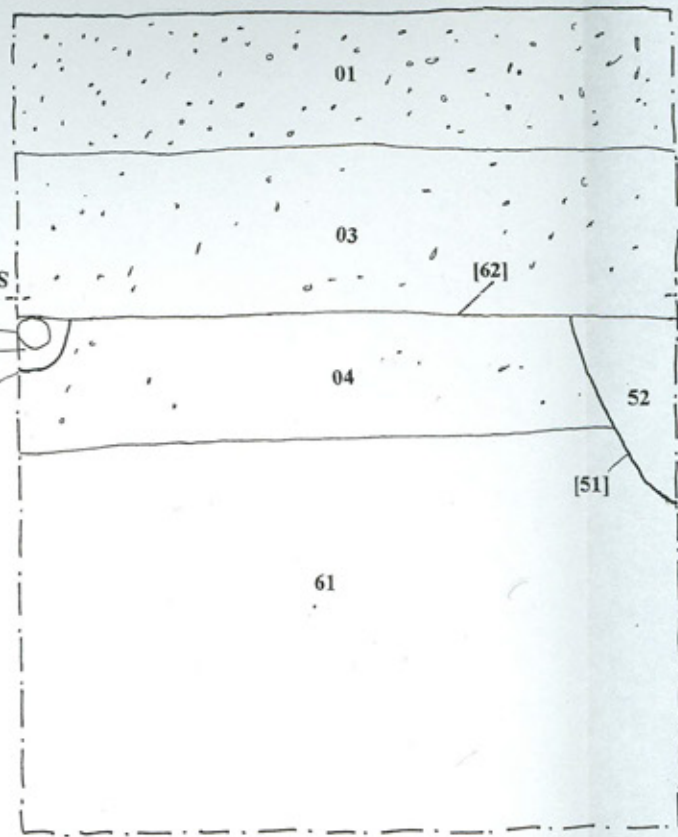


Figure 4: Plans and sections of excavation

**Drawing 9: North section of area of cesspool
Showing ditch 51**



**Drawing 10: West section of area of cesspool
Showing ditch 51**



Drawing 11: East section of area of cesspool

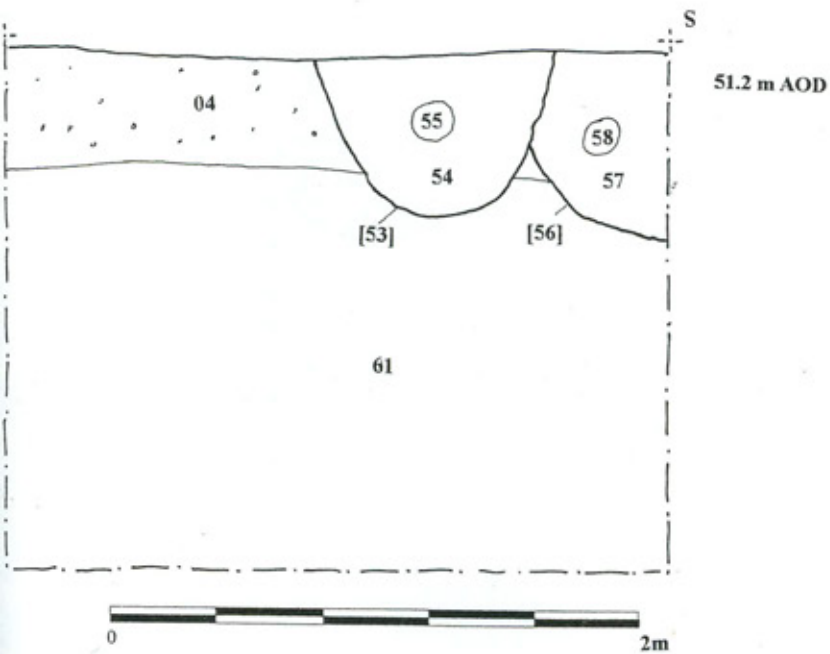


Figure 5: Sections of deepest excavation, in advance of cesspool