

St Mary's Church
Old Basing, Hampshire

Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation





**ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
OLD BASING, HANTS**

Results of an Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation

Prepared for:
Mrs Trisha Renwick
Church Warden
St. Mary's Church,
Old Basing,
Hampshire

by
Wessex Archaeology
Portway House
Old Sarum Park
SALISBURY
Wiltshire
SP4 6EB

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ST. MARY'S CHURCH, OLD BASING, HAMPSHIRE

Results of an Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Mrs Trisha Renwick, Church Warden at St Mary's Church, to undertake an archaeological test pit evaluation at St Mary's Church, Old Basing, Hampshire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 466585 152932. The evaluation was requested by the Archaeological Advisor to the Winchester Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) following the submission of an application to retiling and level the existing floor in the north aisle. The evaluation aimed to assess the level of impact that the proposed work may have on any archaeological deposits.

Five hand-excavated test pits, 1m square, were positioned within the area of the proposed groundworks and excavated to a depth of 0.50m; the maximum depth of any works proposed.

No stratified deposits or floor surfaces survived beneath the existing floor, however two test pits in the north-west corner of the church, west of the north door, revealed a series of previously unrecorded brick-built barrel vaults of probable 18th-19th century construction. These structures were recorded to the level of the existing floor joists in at least one location. Deposits of undifferentiated grey silty clay, derived from reworked grave backfill were present in all three test pits to the east of the north door. Graves are thought to be present throughout this area and coffin outlines were noted in two of the excavations 0.50m beneath the present floor.

A small artefact assemblage including a fragment of Romano-British tile, a fragment of window glass and a 17th century clay pipe bowl was recovered.

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Acknowledgements

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The fieldwork was undertaken by Phil Harding assisted by Julia Sulikowska and Bob Davis. This report was compiled by Phil Harding and the illustrations prepared by Kenneth Lymer. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Sue Farr and Damian De Rosa.

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Results of an Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Mrs Trisha Renwick, Church Warden at St Mary's Church, to carry out an archaeological test pit evaluation within St Mary's Church, Old Basing, Hampshire, centred on NGR 466585 152932 (**Figure 1**), hereafter the Site.

1.1.2 An application has been submitted to the Winchester Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) which comprises the retiling and levelling of the existing floor and the possible installation of underground heating (although this element had not been finalised at the time of the test pit evaluation). The Winchester DAC Archaeological Advisor has recommended that an archaeological test pit evaluation should be undertaken to establish what impact the proposed works may have on any archaeological features or deposits within the north aisle of the church.

1.1.3 A WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation, WA 2008), which set out the manner in which Wessex Archaeology would implement the archaeological test pitting strategy was prepared and submitted to the Client and the DAC Archaeological Advisor for approval prior to the commencement of the test pitting programme.

1.2 The Site, location and geology

1.2.1 The parish church of St Mary is located within the core of Old Basing, at the western end of Church Lane and on a raised area on the south side of the valley of the River Lodden. The church is surrounded by roads and is to the south of the London to Southampton railway line.

1.2.2 The test pits were positioned along the north aisle of the church, extending from the north-west corner of the building to an area level with the north-west pillar of the central crossing, which supports the tower. An additional test pit was positioned immediately north of the pillar itself (**Figure 1**).

1.2.3 The church lies at a height of approximately 78m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

1.2.4 The underlying geology is Upper Chalk.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

1.3.1 The settlement at Old Basing is considered to be a pre-cursor to Basingstoke and was recorded in the Saxon charters.

1.3.2 St Mary's Church lay at the core of the settlement and originally was a wooden construction later rebuilt in stone in 1089. The earliest reference to the church dates to a 1077 record of the rights of advowson owned by the Abbey of Mont St Michel at Basing Church and a second dependent chapel in Basingstoke.

- 1.3.3 The oldest structural features of the present building are the early 12th century northern and southern crossing arches under the tower. The north and south chapels were later additions (the north c. 1325 and the south c. 1530) by the Paulet family, major benefactors to the church.
- 1.3.4 Originally of flint construction, the present church, which formed a Cromwellian stronghold in the English Civil War, was extensively damaged during the siege of the Royalist garrison occupying Old Basing House. The church was largely rebuilt after the war using locally sourced Tudor brickwork from the shell of Old Basing House. Bullet holes are still visible on the outer walls.
- 1.3.5 Various alterations and 'restorations' have taken place within the building since the 17th century, most recently during the late 19th century when the present wooden floor in the north aisle is believed to have been laid.
- 1.3.6 The church is Grade I listed (138932) and within the Old Basing Conservation Area.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Wessex Archaeology, 2009) set out the aims and objectives, strategy and methodology by which Wessex Archaeology would implement the archaeological test pitting. In format and content it conformed with current best practice and to the guidance outlined in *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1999), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE), English Heritage (2006) and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (as amended 2008). The WSI was submitted to and approved by the DAC Archaeological Advisor prior to the start of the fieldwork.

2.2 Aims and scope

- 2.2.1 The archaeological test pitting aimed to:
- clarify the presence/absence and extent of any buried archaeological remains within the Site that may be disturbed by development.
 - identify, within the constraints of the evaluation, the date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the Site.
 - assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons and document the extent of archaeological survival of buried deposits.

3 METHODS

3.1 Fieldwork programme

3.1.1 The archaeological evaluation comprised the excavation of five hand-dug 1m x 1m test pits within the area of proposed works (**Figure 1**).

3.2 Fieldwork

3.2.1 The test pit locations were agreed prior to the commencement of the work and the floor boards and joists lifted to permit access to the underlying deposits.

3.2.2 All excavation was undertaken by hand to the top of archaeological structures (burial vaults) or to 0.50m below ground level, which constitute the lowest formation levels that might be required by the proposed development.

3.2.3 Spoil was examined and scanned for artefacts during the process of excavation.

3.2.4 Each test pit was then cleaned by hand and recorded. Where appropriate, a representative section of deposits through each test pit from ground surface to the top of the base of the test pit or natural geology was described and drawn.

3.3 Recording

3.3.1 All recording was undertaken using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording sheets and recording system.

3.3.2 A complete drawn record of excavated and archaeological features and deposits was compiled. This included both plans and sections, drawn to appropriate scales (1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections). The Ordnance Datum (OD) height of all principal features and levels was calculated and plans/sections annotated with OD heights, not only for the completion of the archaeological archive, but also to assist in the design of the proposed work.

3.3.3 The test pits were located according to the positions detailed in the WSI and the floor boards cut and lifted by the Church Warden in advance of the work commencing.

3.3.4 A full digital photographic record was maintained to record deposits, sections and general site working. This part of the archive recorded both the detail and the general context of the principal features excavated and the Site as a whole.

3.4 Reinstatement

3.4.1 Once the test pits had been excavated, recorded and inspected to the satisfaction of the DAC Archaeological Advisor they were backfilled with the spoil and capped with the Victorian brick rubble, to ensure comprehensive reinstatement of the under-floor levels.

4 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLING

4.1 Finds

4.1.1 All artefacts, apart from redeposited fragments of disarticulated human bone, from excavated contexts were retained. Contingencies were put in place to allow for environmental sampling should deposits of sufficient merit be discovered.

4.2 Human Remains

- 4.2.1 Apart from isolated fragments of redeposited human bone no *in situ* inhumation burials were disturbed or exposed. Disarticulated skeletal fragments were collected during the excavation but were reinterred in the appropriate test pit before it was backfilled.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Results

- 5.1.1 All test pits were capped by a very compact, cemented deposit of angular brick demolition rubble partially set in a binding matrix of lime mortar. This deposit averaged 0.15-0.20m thick and provided a foundation base on which the joists of the present wooden floor boards were set. This phase of work is thought most likely to date from the late 19th century refurbishment of the building.
- 5.1.2 There were no surviving medieval or post-medieval floor surfaces beneath the present floor. All earlier floors appear to have been removed during the 17th or 19th century refurbishments.
- 5.1.3 The foundation deposit lay directly over undifferentiated grey silty clay loam with mixed sub angular chalk lumps, up to 30mm long, but generally nearer 10mm. This deposit represented a reworked grave fill that was largely homogeneous, although it varied in compactness according to the location of the underlying intrusive graves. It was present in the north part of Test Pit 1 and across all of Test Pits 3, 4 and 5. However in the southern part of Test Pit 1 and the entire area of Test Pit 2, the brick rubble lay directly on the roofs of previously unrecorded brick barrel vaults. Two of these structures were present in Test Pit 1 (**Plate 1**).
- 5.1.4 The earlier of the two vaulted roofs, [**105**], which abutted the north wall of the aisle, was located approximately 0.45m below the surface of the brick rubble. It was constructed of rows of dark red bricks measuring 229mm long and 63.5mm thick, set on edge in a hard orange chalk flecked mortar. The overlying backfilled dark grey silty clay loam (**104**) contained weathered chalk pellets, but no brick fragments.
- 5.1.5 The vault to the south [**103**], constructed for the burial of Francis Russell in 1795, Ann, his wife, who died in 1803 and Lucy, his sister, who died in 1797, was built using new hand-made bricks measuring 229mm by 114mm by 50.8mm. They were poorly laid with orange mortar. Bricks exposed in the side of the vault suggest that the side walls are constructed in a header bond. Towards the upper parts of the walls, the construction is marked by four courses of corbelled bricks which support a central barrel vault.
- 5.1.6 The grave backfill (**102**), which overlay the second vault [**103**], was identical in composition to the filling to the north, but contained fragments of fractured brick of similar type to that used in the construction of the vaults. The stratigraphic relationship between the two structures could be seen not only in the arrangements of the bricks themselves, but also by a band of chalk pellets that marked the northern edge of the construction cut for the vault.

- 5.1.7 Removal of the brick foundation course in Test Pit 2 revealed the roof of a barrel vault, approximately 1.04m wide with side walls (**Plate 2**). The east end of the structure rose above the level of the vault to the extent that the floor joists rested directly on the bricks that formed what is likely to be the entrance to the vault. The entrance consisted of a gentle arching structure that extended out to the side walls. The vault itself comprised bricks laid on edge, each 229mm by 114mm by 63.5mm and therefore similar to the late 18th – early 19th century vaults to the west.
- 5.1.8 Test Pit 3 (**Plate 3**) contained a post hole [303] that measured 0.60m in diameter and was exposed in the west section of the test pit. It was cut into the grey silty clay from the base of the brick rubble and held a post, possibly a scaffold pole that was represented by a clear post pipe impression (304).
- 5.1.9 Test Pits 4 (**Plate 4**) and 5 (**Plate 5**) were both characterised by undifferentiated grey silty clay loam to the full depth of 0.50 m. The deposit on the south side of Test Pit 5, was adjacent to the north face of the north-west pillar of the central crossing, and contained a number of 'faced' flint nodules from the medieval building.
- 5.1.10 The outlines of two wooden coffins, fixed with nails, were exposed in the base of Test Pits 4 and 5. Fragments of decayed human skull were noted in the grave in Test Pit 5 which indicated a potentially low level of bone preservation in this grave.
- 5.1.11 Fragments of disarticulated human bone were collected from Test Pits 1, 3, 4 and 5. These were all reinterred at the completion of the work.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1.1 The results of the test pit evaluation have provided a comprehensive record of the deposits and structures underlying the existing wooden floor within the northern aisle of the church.
- 6.1.2 A small artefact assemblage reflecting the human activity related to the history of the building on the Site has been identified. A fragment of Romano-British tile may well have been derived from activity in the locality and reflect reclaimed materials that were incorporated into the first Saxon church on the Site.
- 6.1.3 The fragment of window glass and a 17th century clay pipe bowl may similarly provide the only residual evidence relating to the siege of Old Basing House during the English Civil War.
- 6.1.4 The results have indicated that there are no stratified deposits or floor surfaces that survive beneath the present floor within the area investigated. The north-west corner of the church, to the west of the north door, is entirely occupied by previously unrecorded brick built barrel vaults of probable 18th-19th century construction. These structures are present to the level of the existing floor joists in at least one location.
- 6.1.5 The area to the east of the north door comprises undifferentiated grey silty clay, derived from reworked grave backfill. Graves are thought to be present throughout this area and were encountered in two of the test pits at a level of

only 0.50m beneath the present floor. It is advisable that any proposed reduction of the current floor level should be restricted to less than 0.50m to avoid disturbing any graves present.

7 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION

7.1 Archive Storage

7.1.1 The project archive, consists of

- One A4 file containing the paper records and drawings;
- A box of finds;
- Digital data (site photographs, survey data, word-processed files)

7.1.2 It is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology at Old Sarum, Salisbury, Wiltshire under the project code 69155.

7.1.3 The project archive will be prepared following the 'Procedures for deposit of archaeological archives' with Buckinghamshire County Museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (Walker 1990; SMA 1995; Richards and Robinson 1998; Brown 2007).

7.2 Copyright

7.2.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved. The Museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profit making, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

7.3 Security Copy

7.3.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon), a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at the Museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

8 TEST PIT CATALOGUE

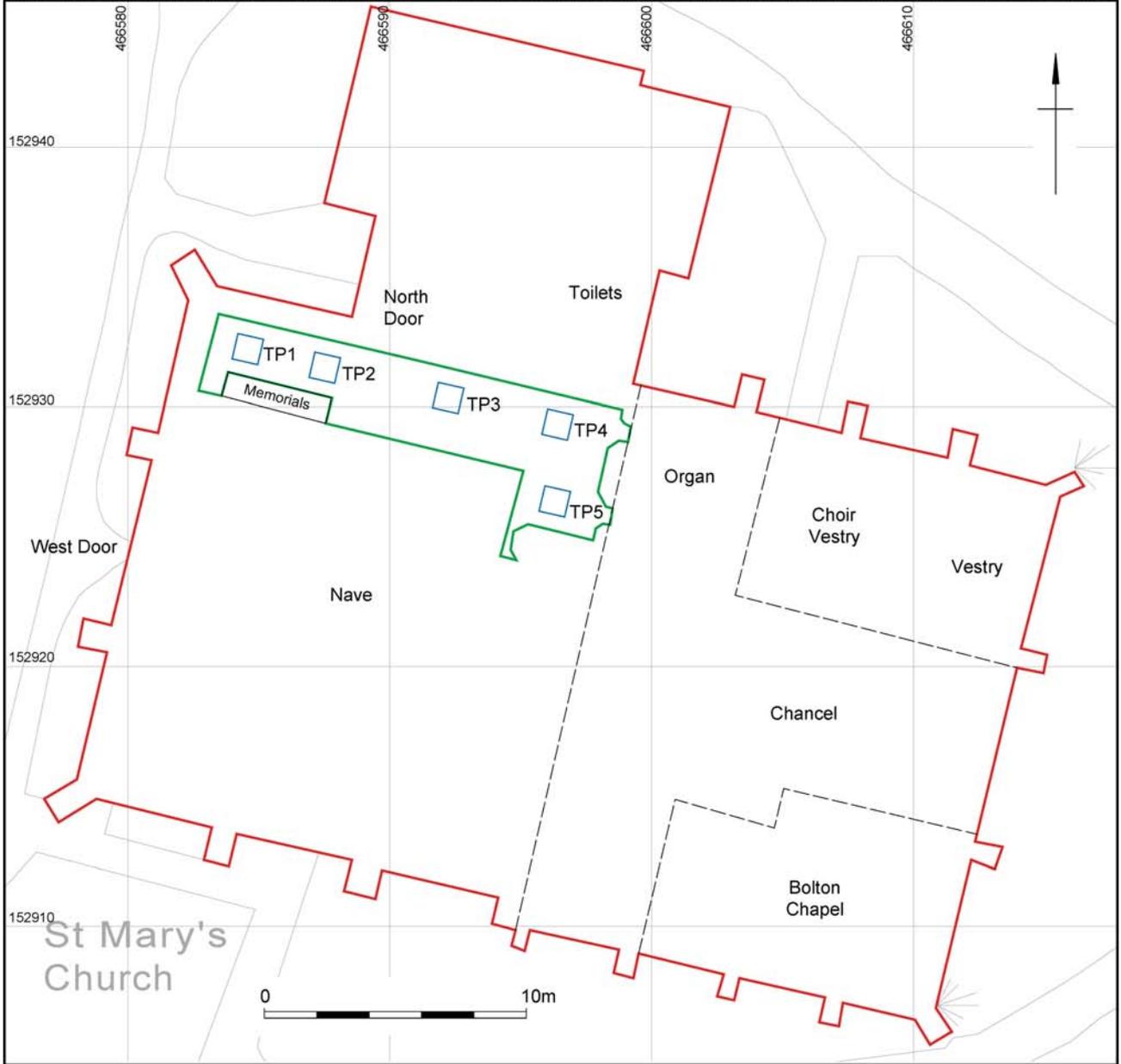
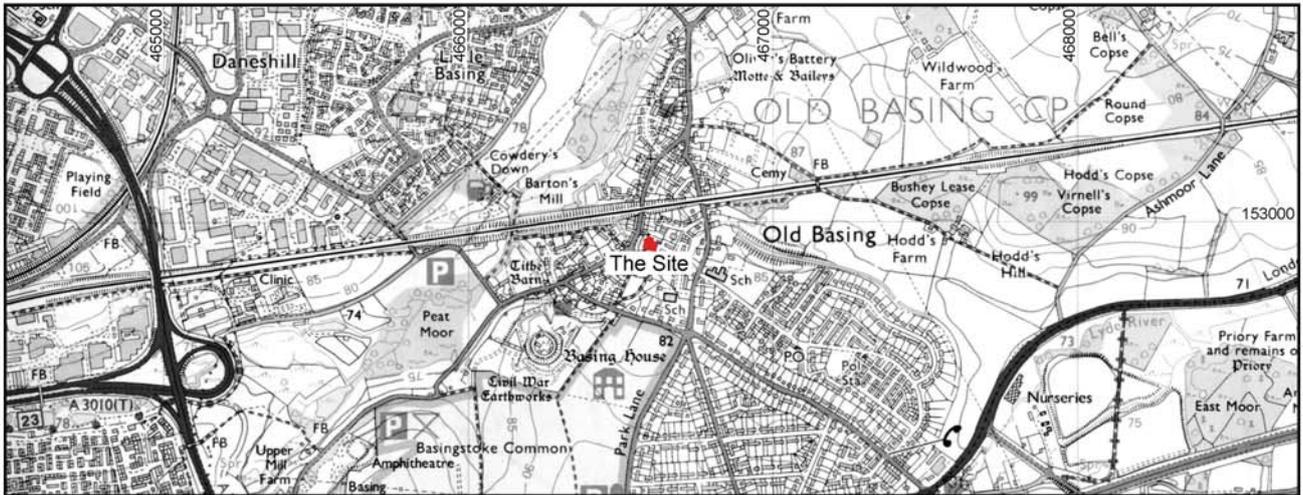
Test Pit 1		
Context	Description	Depth (m)
101	Floor make-up, angular brick rubble, probably derived from Victorian restoration. Very compact partially mortared	0-0.16
102	Fill of 103. Compact redeposited dark grey silty clay loam with sub-angular chalk, up to 30 mm, but predominantly 10 mm (75%) with mixed sub-angular brick fragments.	
103	Russell vault. Constructed of newly fired hand made bricks 9"x4.5"x2". Poorly mortared with orange mix. Effectively header bond side walls with corbelled roof structure leading central barrel vault	
104	Fill of 105. Dark grey silty clay loam with weathered chalk pellets <10 mm (50-60%).	
105	Barrel vault roof. Construction comprises rows of bricks on edge mortared with hard orange chalk-flecked mortar. Bricks as seen 9"x2.5", dark red. Assumed 18 th century.	

Test Pit 2		
Context	Description	Depth (m)
201	Floor make-up, angular brick rubble, probably derived from Victorian restoration. Very compact partially mortared. Immediately overlain by raised wooden floor joists.	0-0.16
202	Barrel vault roof. Width of vault 1.04 m. East end, possible entrance, comprises 0.37 m area, slightly more gentle vault, overarching side walls. Vault of hand made bricks on edge 9"x4.5"x2.75", set in hard chalk flecked mortar.	

Test Pit 3		
Context	Description	Depth (m)
301	Floor make up, mixed brick/flint/mortar rubble. Very compact, mortar bound layer. Probably derived from Victorian restoration	0-0.15
302	Redeposited grave fill. Mid grey-brown silty clay loam with common chalk rubble. Contained disarticulated human bone.	0.15-0.50
303	Cut of post hole in west section of test pit. 0.60 m across. Continues through base of test pit. Filled with 304 and 305	
304	Fill of 303 . Mid orange grey silty clay loam with abundant chalk rubble.	
305	Fill of 303. Post pipe	

Test Pit 4		
Context	Description	Depth (m)
401	Floor make up, mixed brick/flint/mortar rubble. Very compact, lime mortar bound layer. Probably derived from Victorian restoration	0-0.17
402	Reworked grave fill. Pale grey clay silt. Well defined layer of poorly-sorted soil with chalk lumps (20%) with scattered small flints. Disarticulated human bone fragments and CBM. At base of layer grave cut became apparent	0.17-0.50

Test Pit 5		
Context	Description	Depth (m)
501	Floor make up, mixed brick/flint/mortar rubble. Very compact, lime mortar bound layer. Probably derived from Victorian restoration	0-0.20
502	Reworked grave fill. Undifferentiated grey silty clay with mixed sub angular chalk pellets, up to 30mm, but generally 10mm. More compact fill to south with knapped flint nodules from ?pre 17 th century rebuild, with decayed mortar. At base of test pit fragment of Tudor brick (1.75" thick), possibly related to 17 th century rebuild.	0.20-0.50
503	Grave in NE corner. Comprises coffin projecting 0.65m from E section. 0.26 m wide. Base board exposed at W with fragments of badly decayed human skull. No cut seen in section, but fill looser than elsewhere above coffin.	



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Site and test pit location plan

Figure 1



Plate 1: Test Pit 1, view from west



Plate 2: Test Pit 2, view from west



Plate 3: Test Pit 3, east facing section



Plate 4: Test Pit 4, view from east



Plate 5: Test Pit 5, view from above



WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY LIMITED.

Registered Head Office: Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6EB.

Tel: 01722 326867 Fax: 01722 337562 info@wessexarch.co.uk www.wessexarch.co.uk

Maidstone Office: The Malthouse, The Oast, Weaving Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 5JN.

Tel: 01622 739381 info@wessexarch.co.uk www.wessexarch.co.uk

