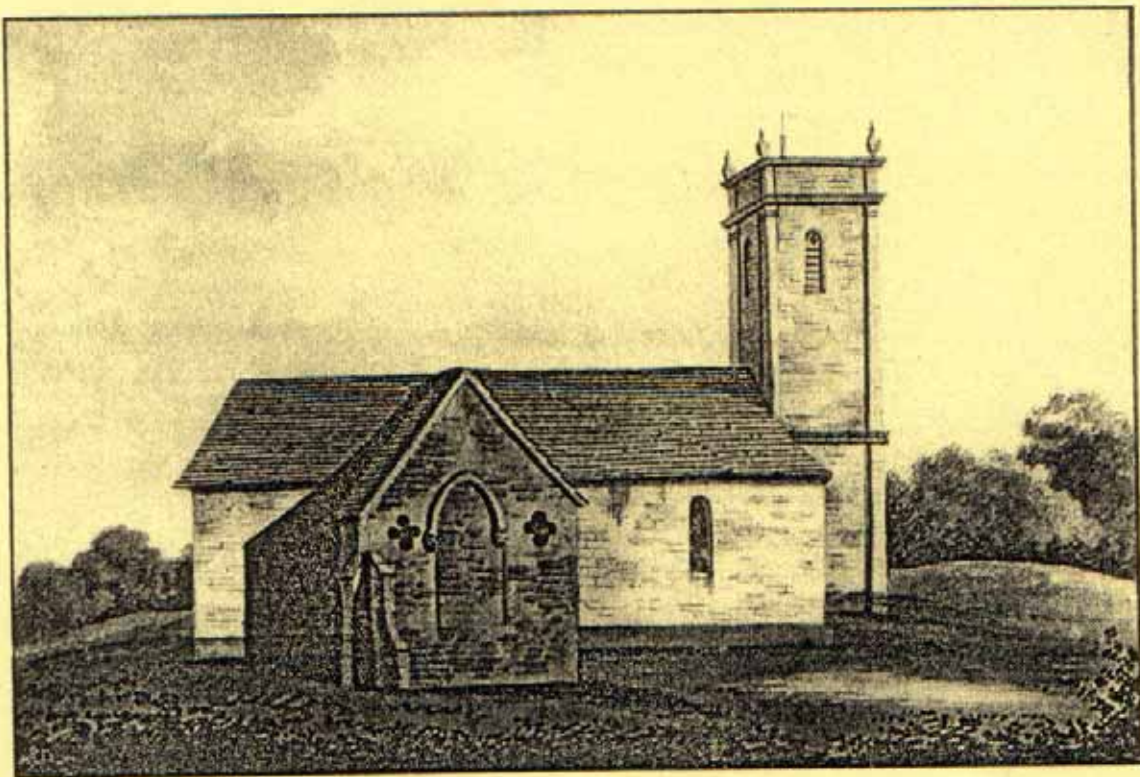


**Archaeological Evaluation at
St James's Church
Weddington, Warwickshire**



**Warwickshire**
County Council
Libraries & Heritage
Museum Field Services
Archaeology Projects Group

January 2000

Summary

Archaeological evaluation at St James's Church, Weddington, north of the existing nave and west of the 14th century north transept, revealed no traces of an earlier structure. No grave cuts were discerned.

1. Introduction

1.1 An application has been submitted to Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council for the erection of a church lounge and toilet extension at St James's Church, Weddington (Planning Ref. TP0463/99). Since the site of the proposed development lies within an area of potential archaeological importance, in an area adjacent to the site of the medieval church, a recommendation was made to the Local Planning Authority that an archaeological field evaluation should be carried out prior to any decision on the application taking place.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of the excavation of two trenches on the lines of proposed new footings, in accordance with a Brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist, on behalf of the Planning Authority, was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum and carried out in December 1999.

2. Location

2.1 The site is centred around national grid reference SP 359 935 in the graveyard of St James's Church, Weddington, just north of the church nave. The total area of the proposed development affects c.60sq m and is presently in use as part of a churchyard.

2.2 The underlying geology of the site is 1st Terrace River Gravel Deposits (British Geological Survey 1994).

3. Aims and Methods of the Evaluation

3.1 The evaluation was designed to discover the date, nature and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits which might be present within the area of the development.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of historical and early map evidence as well as aerial photographs, records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. This was followed by excavation of two trial trenches excavated along the lines of the proposed walls.

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the area comes from the finding of a Bronze Age flat axe in a field to the north-east of the church (Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record No. WA 4501; Fig. 1). This suggests Bronze Age activity in the area but not evidence for a specific site of that period.

4.2 Weddington is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Watitune* with a population that can be estimated at around 105 people (VCH 1904, 314). No priest is mentioned in Domesday and it is uncertain when a church was first established on the site. The earliest surviving part of the present church (SMR WA 1657) dates to

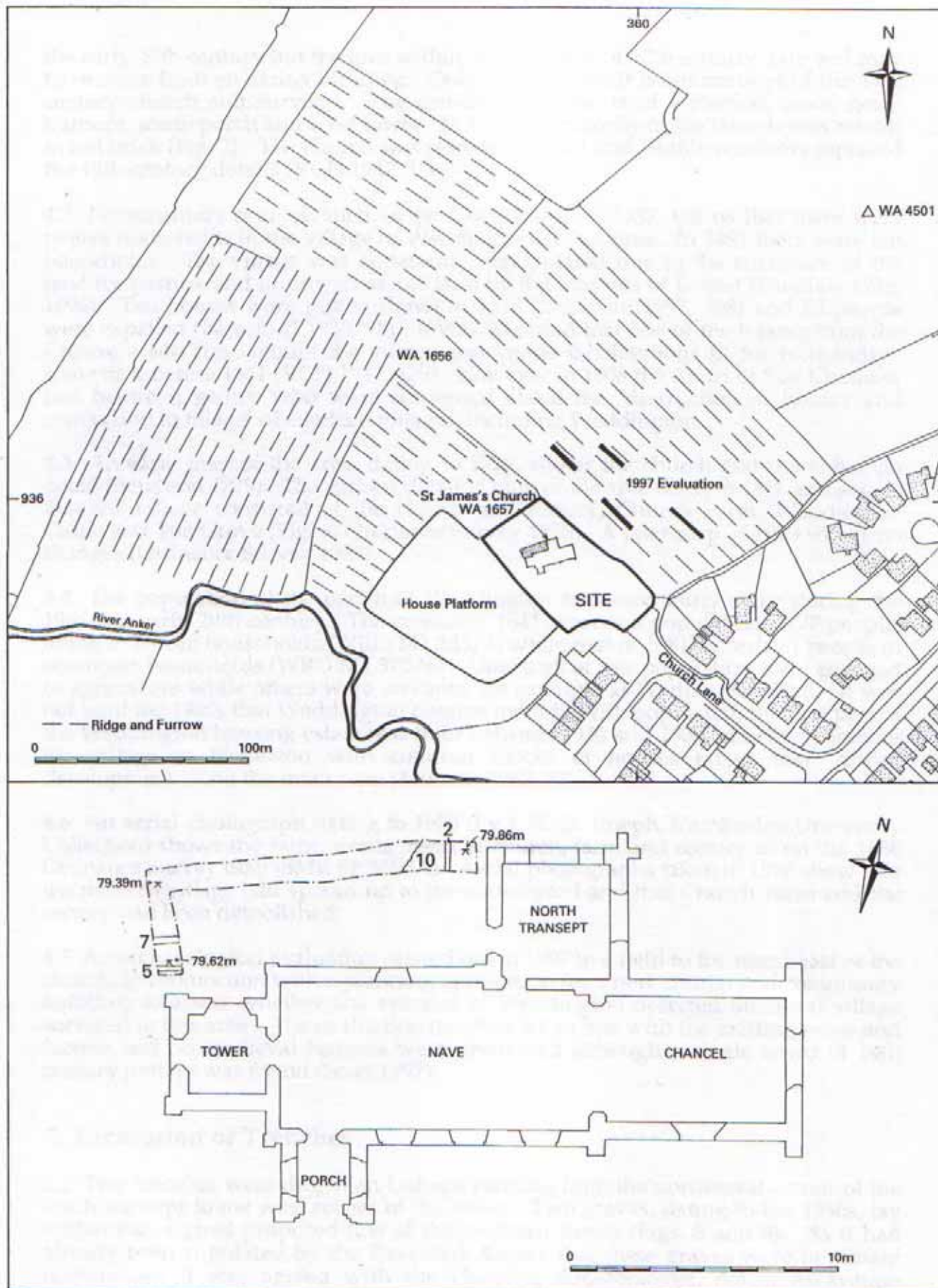


Fig. 1: Site Location and Trench Plan

the early 14th century but the font within the church is of 12th century date and may have come from an earlier building. Only the stone-built north transept of the 14th century church still survives. The church now consists of a chancel, nave, north transept, south porch and west tower. In 1733 the majority of the church was rebuilt in red brick (Fig. 2). The church was restored in 1881 and Gothic windows replaced the 18th century details (VCH 1947, 180).

4.2 Documentary sources, such as the Lay Subsidy of 1332, tell us that there were twelve households in the village of Weddington at that time. In 1491 there were ten households. The village was apparently depopulated due to the enclosure of the land for pasture and improved arable land by the Marquis of Dorset (Dugdale 1730, 1096). Ten houses were pulled down in 1517 (Leadham 1897, 398) and 60 people were expelled (Beresford 1950, 98). It was recorded that one of the lessees from the Crown, a Mr Trye, rebuilt the village and 'made inhabitations fit for husbandry', some time before 1561 (VCH 1947, 179). However in 1608 the Court of Star Chamber had before it gentry who were concerned about the 'destruction of houses and conversion to tillage' of eighteen villages, including Weddington.

4.3 An early map of the area, dating to 1729, shows the church and castle but no detail (Beighton 1729). The earliest detailed map of the area dates to 1888 and shows that the village consisted of the church and rectory, Church Farm, Weddington Castle and The Grove (Fig. 3; Ordnance Survey 1888). A later map of 1923 shows no changes (Ordnance Survey 1923).

4.4 The population of the parish of Weddington remained fairly static during the 19th and early 20th century. The census of 1841 records a population of 77 people, living in eleven households (WRO M1 333/3) while that of 1881 records 81 people in seventeen households (WRO M1 370/6). Almost all of this population were engaged in agriculture while others were servants, for example at Weddington Hall. It was not until the 1930s that Weddington became more heavily populated; the first part of the Weddington housing estate was built between 1930 and 1933, effectively joining the village to Nuneaton with compact blocks of houses rather than ribbon development along the main road (Milburn 1963, 72).

4.6 An aerial photograph dating to 1955 (by J. K. St. Joseph, Cambridge University Collection) shows the same arrangement of church, farm and rectory as on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map (SMR SP 3593A). Aerial photographs taken in 1990 show that the modern village had spread up to the churchyard and that Church Farm and the rectory had been demolished.

4.7 An archaeological evaluation carried out in 1997 in a field to the north-east of the church, in conjunction with a planning application for a new church and community building, to assess whether any remains of Weddington deserted medieval village survived in this area. The evaluation trenches lay in line with the existing ridge and furrow and no medieval features were uncovered although a single sherd of 14th century pottery was found (Scott 1997).

5. Excavation of Trenches

5.1 Two trenches were dug in an L-shape running from the north-west corner of the north transept to the west corner of the tower. Two graves, dating to the 1950s, lay within the original proposed line of the northern trench (Figs. 5 and 6). As it had already been stipulated by the Reverend Adams that these graves were to remain undisturbed it was agreed with the Planning Archaeologist, before excavation commenced, that the northern trench would veer around the graves to cause the minimum of disturbance in this area.



Fig. 2: Weddington Church, c.1820 (VCH 1947, opp. 179)

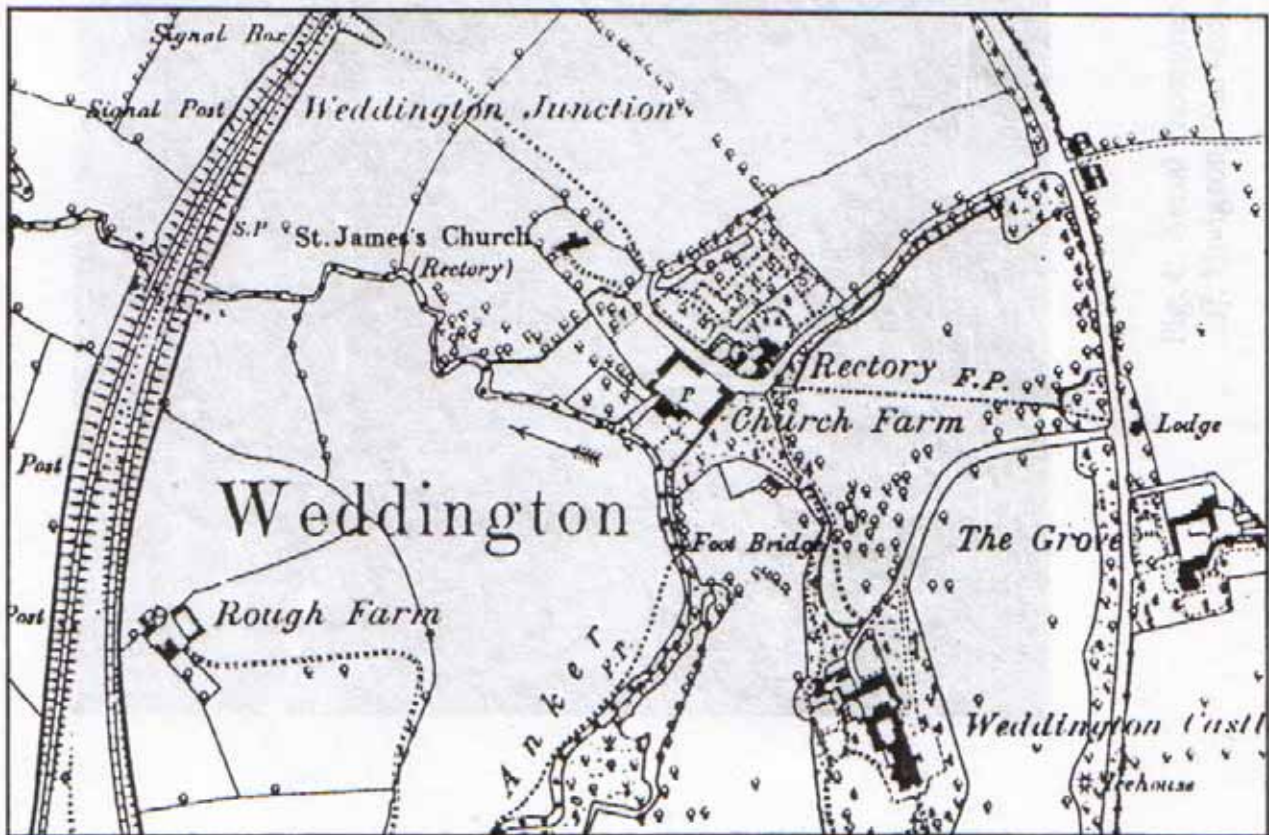


Fig. 3: Detail from the Ordnance Survey map of 1888

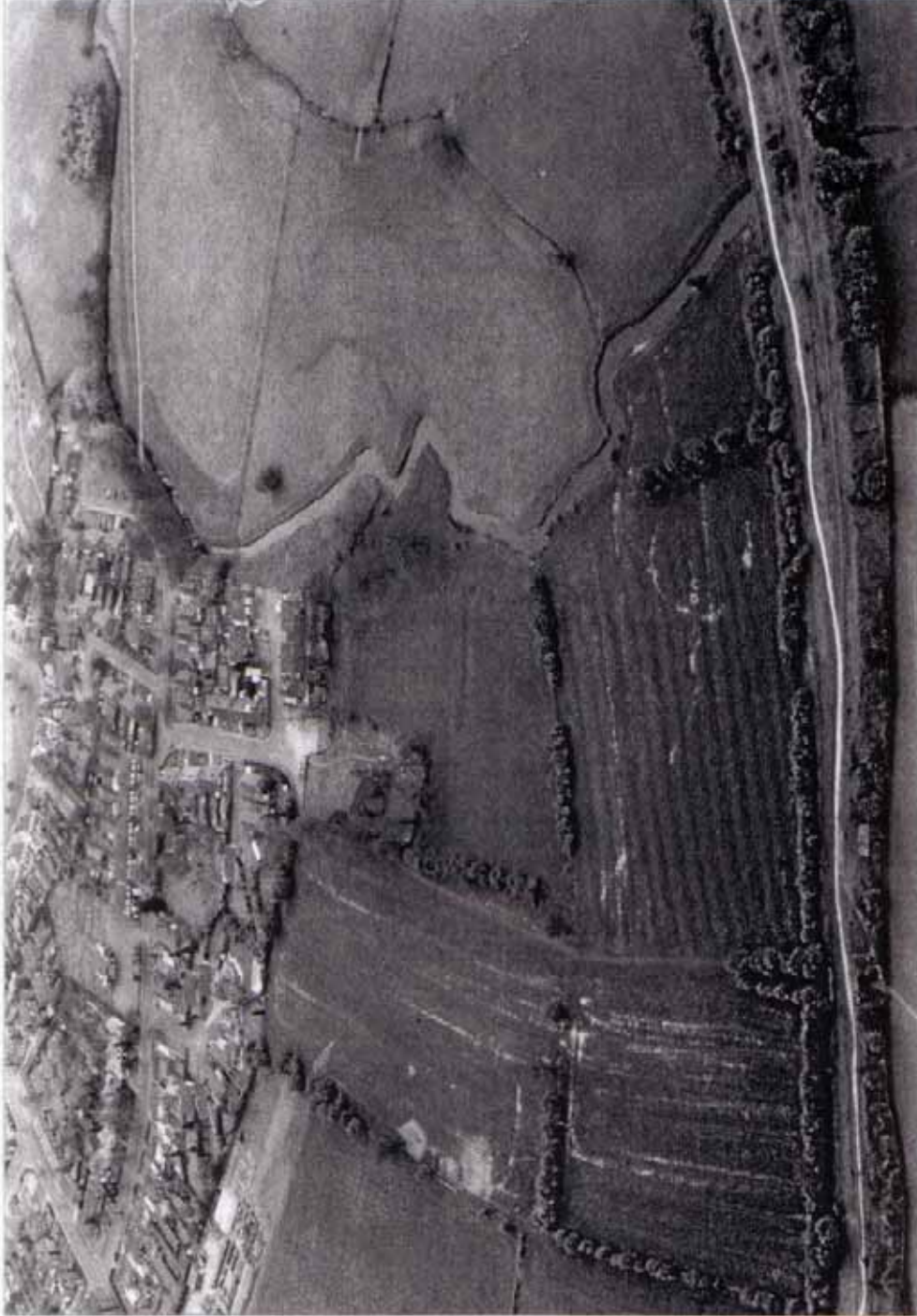


Fig. 4: Aerial Photograph of St James's Church
(J. Hodgson, Warwickshire Museum, 1990)



Fig. 5: Evaluation Area before Excavation

5.2 The northern trench measured 12.60m long by 1.10m wide and was aligned WSW-ENE (Fig. 6). The geological natural red clay, sand and gravel (9), lay at a depth of between 0.47m and 0.83m below the modern ground surface (at a maximum level of 80.16m aod).

5.3 At the eastern end of the trench, overlying the geological natural, was a spread of sandstone rubble (10) which was up to 0.38m deep and was cut (2) by the trench for a modern plastic drainpipe (3). In the remainder of the trench the geological natural was sealed by a layer of strong brown sandy loam subsoil (4), lying at the same level as the rubble. The rubble, subsoil and drainpipe were sealed by modern topsoil (1)

5.5 The western trench measured 4.10m long by 1.10m wide and was aligned roughly NW-SE (Fig. 7). The geological natural red clay, mixed with sand and gravel (9) lay at a depth of 0.60m below the current ground surface. In the southern half of the trench the geological natural was cut (7) by the trench for a ceramic pipe (8). The subsoil (4), overlying the geological natural, was cut (5) by the trench for a live gas pipe (6 - unexcavated). The subsoil was sealed by c.0.26m of modern topsoil (1)

6. Conclusions

6.1 No archaeological deposits or artefacts of medieval date were found during the evaluation. The absence of graves and human remains is surprising as these would be expected adjacent to the medieval church. The lack of human remains in this area suggests that the main area for burial is located further away from the church.

6.2 The area evaluated contained modern services and a spread of rubble. It is possible that the latter is a remnant of building demolition rubble from the earlier

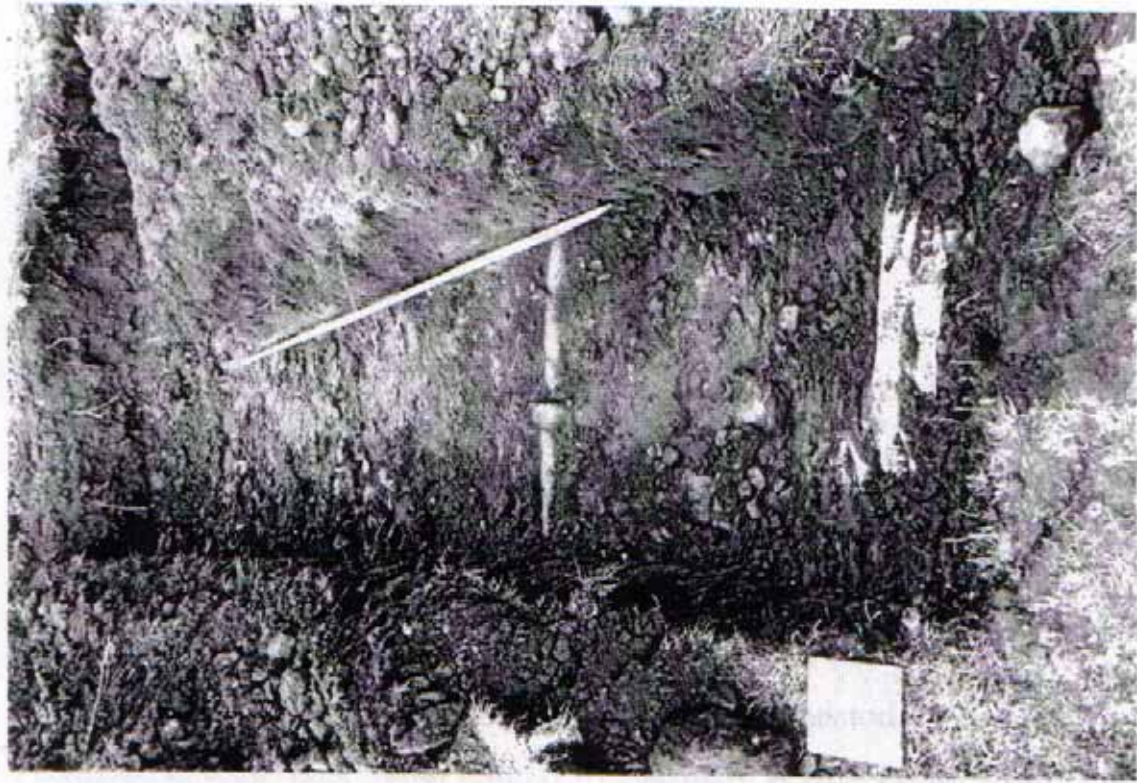


Fig. 7: Western Trench



Fig. 6: Northern Trench

church; the Rev. Tony Adams reported that such areas of rubble are located all over the graveyard.

Acknowledgements

The Warwickshire Museum would like to thank the Reverend Tony Adams of St James's Church, for commissioning the work. Work on site was carried out by Robert Jones and Kevin Wright and this report was written by Catherine Coutts and Robert Jones with illustrations by Candy Stevens.

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Appendix: List of Aerial Photographs

Grid	Film Ref.	Date	Photographer
SMR SP 3593/A	001 PI 036	30/3/55	J. K. St Joseph,
SMR SP 3593/B	WAN6316/31	10/04/90	John Hodgson
SMR SP 3593/D	WAN6316/03	10/04/90	Nicholas Palmer
SMR SP 3593/E	WAN6316/04	10/04/90	Nicholas Palmer
SMR SP 3593/F	WAN6316/05	10/04/90	Nicholas Palmer



Warwickshire
County Council

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Archaeology Projects Group, Warwickshire Museum Field Services
The Butts, Warwick, CV34 4SS *Tel: 01926 412280/412278 Fax: 01926 412974*