

**THE BAPTIST CHURCH, COXWELL STREET,  
CIRENCESTER, GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

BY  
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FOR  
CIRENCESTER BAPTIST CHURCH



*Cotswold  
Archaeological  
Trust*

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COXWELL STREET, CIRENCESTER,  
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## **GLOSSARY**

### **MEDIEVAL**

Taken here as the period from the Norman invasion in AD 1066 to approximately AD 1500.

### **NATURAL**

Defined in archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, e.g. Lower Lias clay, river terrace gravels etc.

### **NGR**

National Grid Reference given from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

### **OD**

Ordnance Datum; used to express a given height above mean sea level.

### **POT-SHERD**

A fragment of a pottery vessel.

### **PRN**

Principal Record Number (used for entries on the County SMR)

### **SITE**

Sites may be defined as 'windows' onto the archaeological resource, e.g. an excavation, aerial photograph, or an old map. Any of these may reveal certain archaeological features (pits, ditches, etc) which can be classed as components, but not monuments.

### **SMR**

Sites and Monument Record.

## **SUMMARY**

During January, February, and March 1997 a number of visits was made to Cirencester Baptist Church, in order to conduct an Archaeological Watching Brief during refurbishment of the church. Three separate graves were encountered, two of which were contained in vaults. One of these vaults contained two burials. In addition, a quantity of disarticulated human bone was recovered and two walls recorded. After recording and lifting all human remains were retained in the church for later reburial.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***1.1 Introduction***

1.1.1 In January 1997 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned by the Baptist Church, Coxwell Street, Cirencester to undertake an Archaeological Watching brief at The Baptist Church, Coxwell, Street Cirencester, Gloucestershire (NGR SP 0216 0214) (Figs 1 and 2).

1.1.2 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16), and the '*Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*' (IFA).

### ***1.2 The Study Area***

1.2.1 The study area lies in the centre of Cirencester on the southern side of Coxwell Street. Coxwell Street lies between Thomas Street and Dollar Street, within the historic core of Cirencester.

1.2.2 The intended development is within the walls of the existing Baptist Church building. Most of the structural work required to modernise the existing building is confined to the Vestry and Main Hall. The works comprise the removal of existing floor surfaces, internal walls, and part of the roof over the church hall.

1.2.3 The underlying geology of the area is dominated by alluvial deposits of Quaternary date, comprising pre-Holocene gravels, and later alluvial silts. The underlying solid geology is Forest Marble. The study area is comparatively flat and lies at a height of 110m OD.

### **1.3 *Historical Background***

- 1.3.1 The study area lies within an area of high archaeological interest. It is within the bounds of the Roman town of *Corinium*, and close to the putative site of the Roman theatre.
- 1.3.2 Coxwell Street is first attested as Abbotstrete in the early thirteenth century (Slater 1976, 102), becoming Abbot Street by 1540, and renamed Coxwell Street in the seventeenth century after a wealthy resident family of that name (Gerrard 1994, 99).
- 1.3.3 The present church was built in 1856/57 and replaced an earlier chapel of *c* 1650 (Gerrard and Viner 1994, 127).
- 1.3.4 Gumstool brook which runs east-to-west has been culverted at the southern end of the site and runs under the Main Hall.

### **1.4 *Aims and Objectives***

- 1.4.1 The objective of the watching brief was to observe all groundworks in order to record any archaeological deposits encountered during the renovation work.

### **1.5 *Methodology***

- 1.5.1 The works requiring archaeological supervision comprised removal of floors, and the reduction of ground surfaces. The extent of the area disturbed during the course of these works is shown in Figure 3.
- 1.5.2 All identified features were recorded in accordance with the Cotswold Archaeological Trust *Field Recording Manual* (1996). Artefacts and human remains recovered during the watching brief were catalogued and analysed in

accordance with the Cotswold Archaeological Trust *Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation* Technical Manual 3 (1993). Human remains were bagged and stored for reburial at a later date.

- 1.5.3 The site archive will be deposited, subject to agreement with the legal landowner at Corinium Museum, Cirencester.

## **2. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS**

### **2.1 *General***

- 2.1.1 A series of visits was made to the site during January, February, and March of 1997, during the excavation of foundation trenches and the removal of floor layers and their underlying makeup.
- 2.1.2 The watching brief identified three burials, two walls, and some disarticulated skeletal material.
- 2.1.3 Observation, during the excavation of trial foundation trenches, showed that the red brick walls of the Main Hall were built on stone foundations, which extended to a depth of at least 1.5m below the present surface.

### **2.2 *Wall 1 (Fig 3)***

- 2.2.1 Wall 1 was oriented north-to-south and was located in the south west part of the Main Hall. The wall was partly obscured by the walls of the Hall, so that its full width could not be determined. The wall, however, was at least 0.7m in width. The wall was exposed at 0.6m below the present ground surface and may extend to a depth of at least 1.8m. It appeared to have a mortared core with a cut stone face. The northern and southern ends of the wall were seen to be bonded into the existing walls of both the Main Hall and the culvert, which

runs across the southern part of the building.

### **2.3 *Wall 2 (Fig 3)***

2.3.1 Wall 2 was on the same orientation as Wall 1 and appeared to extend to a similar depth. The overall width of the wall was 0.8m. Both faces were of cut stone and the core appeared to be mortared. As with Wall 1, the northern and southern ends of the wall were seen to be bonded into the existing walls of both the Main Hall and the culvert.

### **2.4 *Grave 1 (Fig 3)***

2.4.1 Grave 1 was located within the northern part of the Main Hall.

2.4.2 The burial was contained within a brick vault which was oriented west-south-west to east-north-east and capped by an uninscribed limestone slab. The vault was constructed of nine courses of mortared brick and measured *c* 2.2m long by 0.56m wide at the head and 0.68m at its mid point.

2.4.3 This variation in the width of the vault appears to have been designed to accommodate a coffin, traces of which survived in the form of metal coffin fittings and nails. The fittings suggest an eighteenth or nineteenth-century date for the burial.

2.4.4 The skeleton within the vault was intact and 1.78m in length. It lay in a fully extended position, with arms to the side, at a depth of 1.65m below the modern ground surface. After recording and lifting the skeleton was reburied within the chapel.

### **2.5 *Grave 2 (Fig 3)***

2.5.1 Grave 2 was located in the north-east corner of the Main Hall and had been much disturbed, prior to recording.

2.5.2 The burial was contained in a grave measuring c1.8m by 0.6m and oriented east-to-west. The surviving parts of the skeleton (pelvis, legs, and right arm) were recorded and lifted, prior to reburial in the chapel.

## **2.6 *Grave 3 (Fig 3)***

2.6.1 Grave 3 was located immediately to the north of the east-to-west wall separating the Main Hall from the Vestry.

2.6.2 Two burials were contained within a vault. This was sealed with a stone slab, which was visible at a depth of 0.2m below the present floor level. Careful cleaning of the slab did not reveal any inscription.

2.6.3 The vault measured 2m by 1m and was 1.8m deep, with lateral iron bars at 0.8m depth to separate the two burials, although the processes of decay meant that all material in the grave had fallen to the base of the vault. The vault was constructed from ashlar limestone blocks jointed with lime putty.

2.6.4 Both burials were poorly preserved and bone survival was poor, although both skulls and most of the long bones were lifted after recording. Several brass coffin fittings were also removed from the vault. The fittings suggest an eighteenth or nineteenth-century date for the burials. After recording and lifting the skeletons were reburied within the chapel.

## **2.7 *Disarticulated Skeletal Material (Fig 3)***

2.7.1 A small quantity of human bones were found within a section of the foundation trench located against the northern wall of the main church hall. These were reburied within the chapel after recording.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1 Only limited conclusions can be drawn from the results of the Archaeological Watching Brief conducted at the Coxwell Street Baptist Church. Due to the lack of dedications on the slabs covering the graves, none can be dated to closer than the eighteenth or nineteenth century (on the basis of the coffin fittings). The burials could thus be associated with either the present structure or its seventeenth-century predecessor.
  
- 3.2 The walls recorded during the Watching Brief were observed under difficult conditions. It does appear, however, that both Walls 1 and 2 were bonded with the south wall of the Main Hall and the south wall of the culvert. They may, therefore, form an element of the construction of the 1856/57 church and the contemporary construction or refurbishment of this section of culvert.

#### 4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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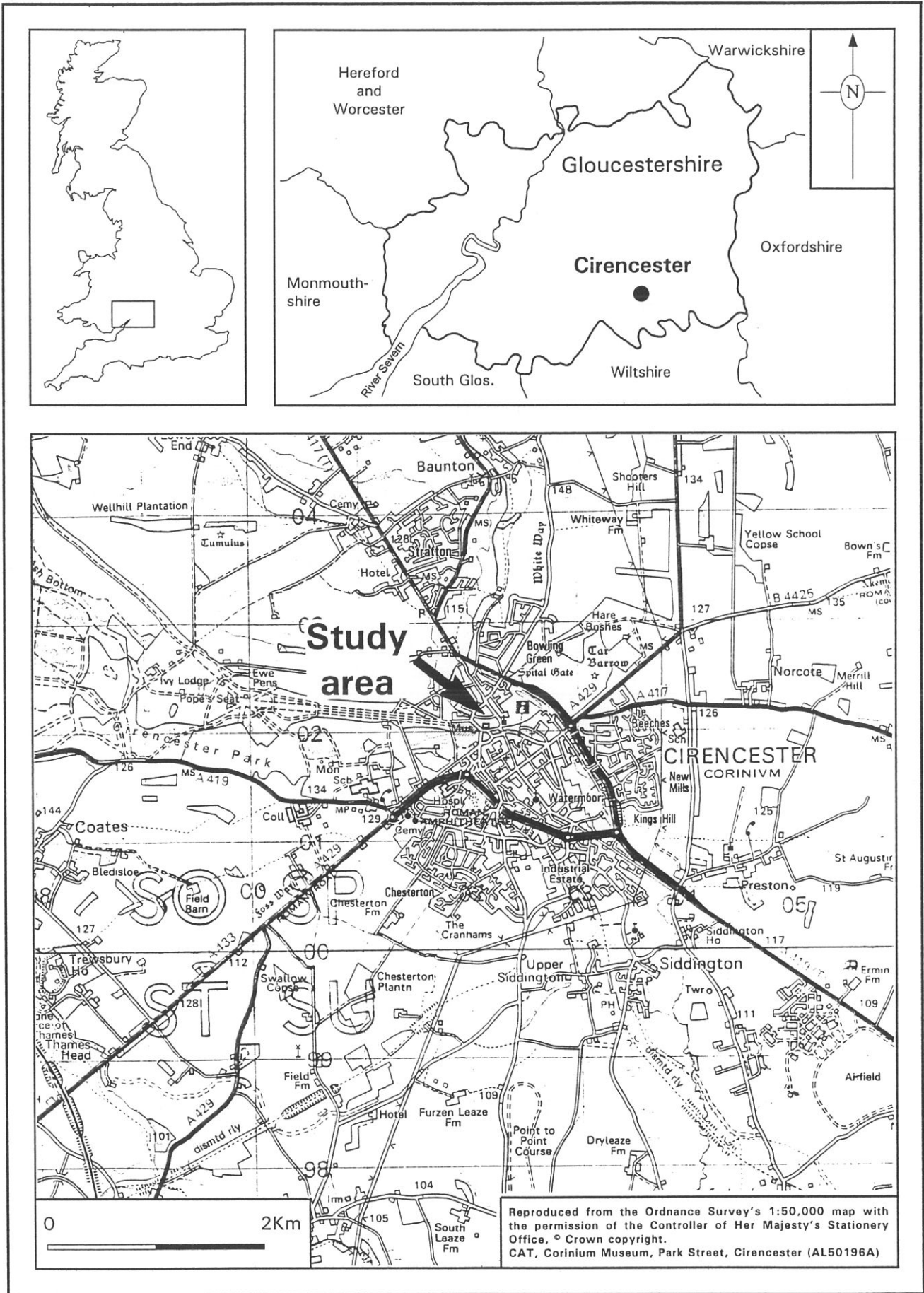


Fig. 1 Location plan

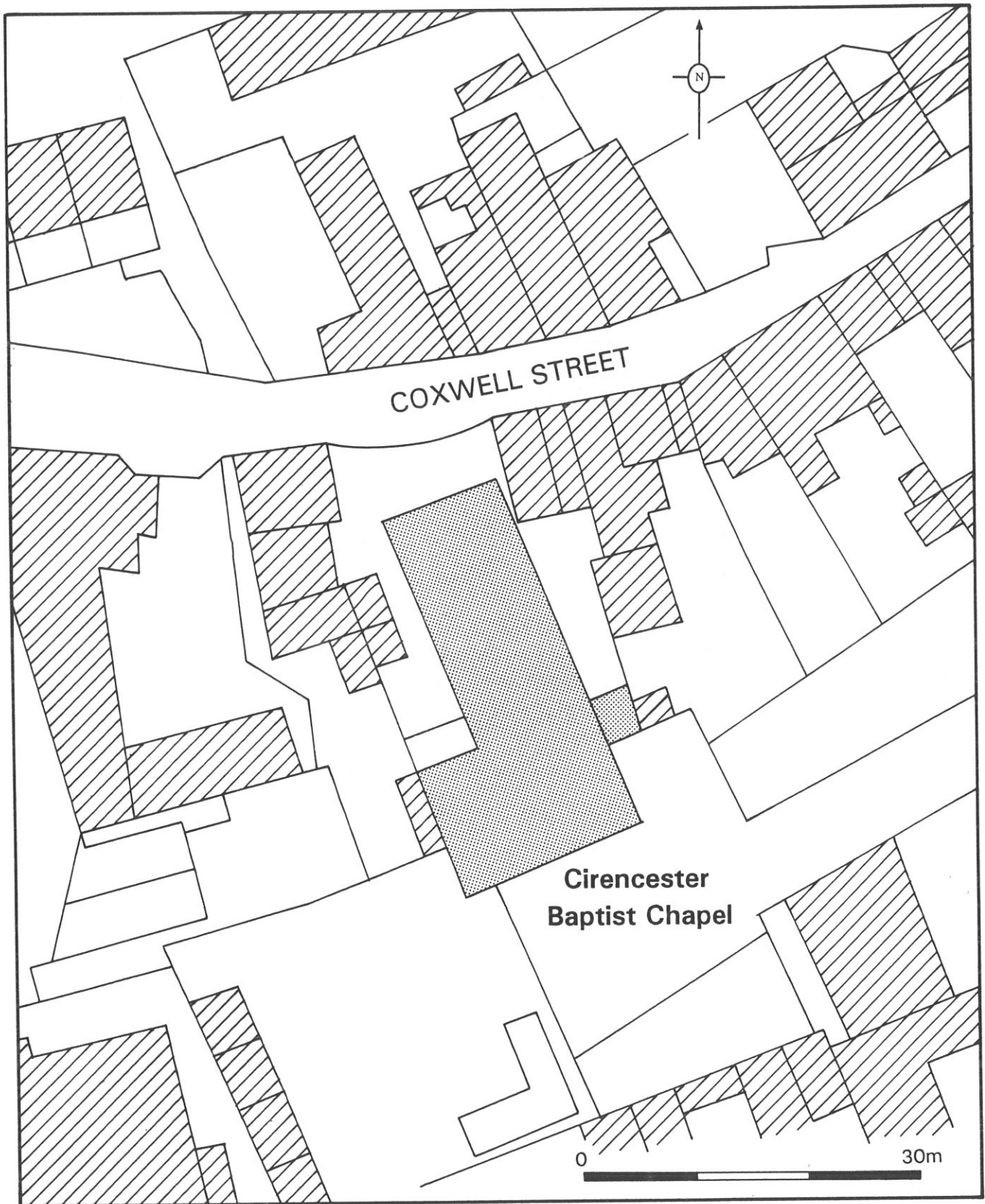


Fig. 2 Cirencester Baptist Chapel and surrounding area

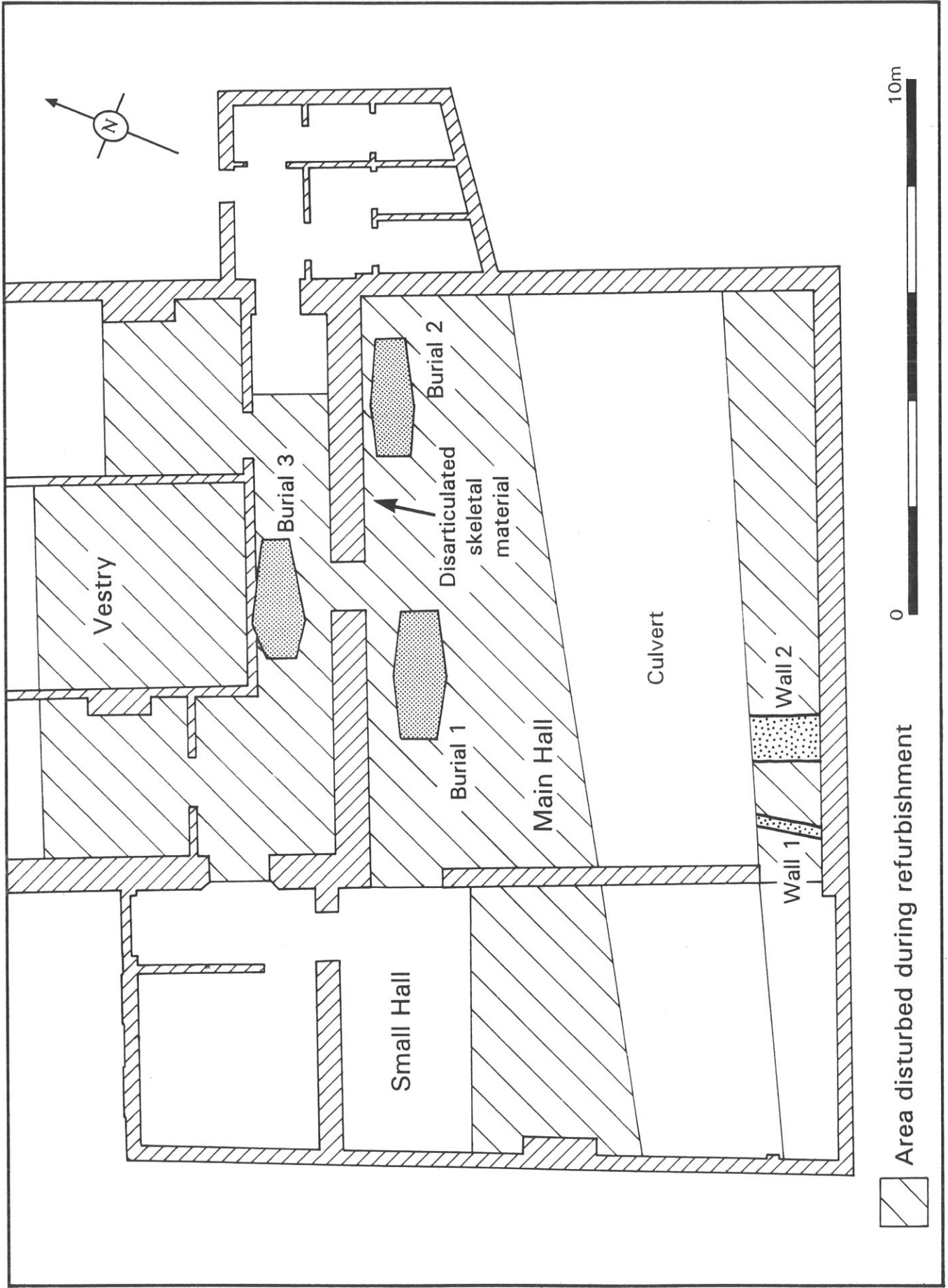


Fig. 3 Southern area of Cirencester Baptist Chapel and archaeological features