



# **St Margaret's Church, Roath, Cardiff**

## Archaeological Watching Brief



By  
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Report No 652.

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# St Margaret's Church, Roath, Cardiff

## Archaeological Watching Brief

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## Contents

Summary	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Location and Geology	1
3. Aims and Objectives	1
4. Results	1
4.1 Toilet extension excavation	1
4.2 Graveyard Trenches	2
5. Interpretation	3
6. Acknowledgements	4

## Figures

Fig. 1	Location of site
Fig. 2	Location of the drainage works and graves
Fig. 3	Toilet extension trench
Fig. 4	Vault within the toilet extension trench
Fig. 5	View north along the trench for the electricity cable
Fig. 6	Brick-built vaults within the drainage trench
Fig. 7	Soakaway trench

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## **Summary**

*In August and September 2010, Cambrian Archaeological Projects undertook an archaeological watching brief during construction and drainage works at St Margaret's Church, Roath, Cardiff. The work revealed that the graveyard contained a number of brick-built vaulted graves together with grave cuts. The work also uncovered the shattered remains of a number of gravestones destroyed by Cardiff Council in the early 1960s. The presence of the vaulted graves on the line of both the soakaway and the foul drains resulted in a deviation from the original plans, following consultation with Caroe and Partners.*

## **1. Introduction**

In June 2010, Cambrian Archaeological Projects were commissioned by Jonathan Saunders of Caroe and Partners, Penniless Porch, Market Place, Wells, Somerset BA5 2RB to undertake an archaeological watching brief during construction and drainage works at St Margaret's Church, Roath, Cardiff (NGR: ST 1991 7775; fig. 1). The work was to be carried out in two phases:

- Excavation of footprint of the new toilet extension.
- Excavation of trenches through the graveyard to accommodate electrics, water and drainage pipes and the excavation of a soakaway.

The work was undertaken over six days in August and September 2010 Dr Amelia Pannett.

## **2. Location and Geology**

St Margaret's Church is located in the centre of Roath, on the eastern side of Cardiff. The Church sits within a small graveyard that is slightly raised above the surrounding area at 8m AOD. The underlying geology is reclaimed estuarine marsh overlying a bed of Triassic sandstone (British Geological Survey 2001).

## **3. Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives of the watching brief were to record any archaeological features identified during the works and mitigate against the disturbance of burials.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Toilet extension excavation**

The extension for the new toilet block was located on the south-eastern side of the church between the southern transept and the vestry door (fig. 2 and fig. 3). The footprint was square in shape, measuring 4m long by 4m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.3m across the centre and 0.6m around the outside edges.

The excavated area cut through the turf and topsoil and into a deposit of reddish brown subsoil. The subsoil contained occasional fragments of human bone, evidently derived from disturbed graves. Two grave cuts were identified on the southern side of the excavated area. These lay parallel to each other, approximately 0.2m apart. Both were around 2m in length and 0.5m wide and contained fairly compact dark brown clay silt with small fragments of coal.

In the south-western corner of the excavated area the end of a brick-built vaulted grave was revealed (fig. 4). This was exposed for a 1m up to the outer wall of the church. The grave clearly pre-dates the construction of the present church in 1870 as the remainder of the grave must run under the wall. It is likely to have been either destroyed or badly disturbed during the construction of the transept wall.

None of the graves were disturbed during this work.

## **4.2 Graveyard trenches**

### **4.2.1 Electrics**

A trench measuring 9m in length, 0.3m wide and 0.4m deep was excavated along the southern wall of the southern transept to accommodate an electric cable (fig. 2 and fig. 5). The trench cut through the turf and topsoil and into a mixed layer of topsoil and stone – evidently disturbed during the construction of the new church in 1870. The foundations for the southern transept wall were encountered at both the south-western and south-eastern corners, and where the buttress extends from the wall.

No graves were revealed or evidence of disturbed burials identified in this trench.

### **4.2.2 Drainage**

A 7m long and 0.5m wide trench was excavated southwards from the south-western corner of the new toilet block extension to the boundary wall of the churchyard. This was excavated to a depth of 0.2m at the northern end, increasing to 0.7m at the southern end where it meets the soakaway (fig. 2). The trench cut through the topsoil and into the yellow clay subsoil.

Two brick-built vaulted graves were identified at the northern end of the trench. These were constructed side by side, 0.2m south of the vault identified in the toilet block extension trench. Both graves were capped by sandstone slabs sitting on the upper courses of brick walling (fig. 6).

The eastern slab on the northern grave was broken and had fallen into the void within the vault, and the middle slab was disturbed during the excavation of the trench. The middle slab was put back in its original position, while the broken southern slab was removed from the grave and replaced with a concrete paving slab. The burial was visible in the base of the vault, partly covered by a layer of slates. The drainage pipe was laid over the top of the grave slabs. Neither grave was disturbed.

No further graves were revealed in the trench, although four fragments of human bone were identified within the topsoil.

The soakaway measured 1m by 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m (fig. 2 and fig 7). It cut through the turf and topsoil and a deposit of shattered gravestones and fragments of laminated wooden Cardiff Council roadworks signs. Judging from the font used in the signs, they date from the 1960s. It is thought that the modern soakaway trench was excavated on the location of an existing one that had been filled with debris and broken marker stones from the graveyard. The base of the soakaway cut into a layer of river gravels. No graves were revealed in the soakaway trench.

#### 4.2.3 Foul water trench

The trench for the foul water pipe, leading from the toilet extension to the sewer, was originally designed to run eastwards from the southern side of the toilet block for 13m, and through the gate in the boundary wall. However, the discovery of multiple vaulted graves on the eastern side of the graveyard resulted in the route of the drains having to be altered.

The final trench was 0.3m wide and ran eastwards from the south-eastern corner of the new toilet block. It cut through the turf and topsoil and into the yellow clay subsoil and was excavated to a depth of 0.3m at the western end, falling to 0.5m at the eastern end. One grave cut was identified 4.5m along the trench. The trench was excavated 0.2m into the upper surface of the cut, but no burial deposits were revealed.

Ten metres from the western end of the trench, two vaulted graves were encountered. One was located on the line of the planned trench, with the western end of the vault revealed as a brick-built box capped by sandstone slabs. The slabs were disturbed by the trench excavation, but were not broken and were set back into their original position. The burial was not disturbed. The second vault was located immediately to the north of the trench. The southern, side, wall of the brick-built structure was revealed on the edge of the trench. It was not disturbed.

The trench was subsequently re-routed southwards for 3m, finishing adjacent to the boundary wall. At the southern end of the trench, 0.4m below the surface, a deposit of friable rotten wood and iron nails were recovered. These evidently derived from a coffin, however, investigation of the area surrounding the find did not reveal evidence for a grave cut, or any further traces of a coffin. It is likely that this material originated from a previously disturbed burial.

Attempts to route the line of the trench along the wall and out through the gate were abandoned after further vaulted graves were identified on the south-western side of the gate. Instead, it was decided, following discussion with Jonathan Saunders, that the pipe would have to exit the graveyard beneath the wall.

A small assemblage of fragments of human bone was recovered from the trench. All were disarticulated and found within the subsoil, the result of previous disturbance. The lower end of a femur was identified. This was badly deformed with bone growths indicating that the person suffered from a debilitating condition.

All the bones found in the graveyard excavations were reburied in the base of the trench.

## 5. Interpretation

The excavations within the graveyard at St Margaret's have provided an interesting insight into the status of the Church and the burial ground and its position within the wealthy society of Victorian Roath. The number of vaulted graves revealed – six confirmed and a further two suspected – within a small part of the graveyard demonstrates the affluent nature of the people buried here. Photographs of the church and graveyard held by the Church dated to the late 1800s, show the graveyard filled by large and elaborate gravestones and tombs the majority of which were destroyed

by Cardiff Council in the 1960s. The remains of a number of these were identified in the soakaway trench.

The Church had a long association with the Bute family, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess funding the construction of the present Church in the 1870s. It would seem that this association with the first family of Cardiff attracted other wealthy families to worship and be buried at St Margaret's.

The identification of one vaulted grave that predates the present Church demonstrates that this was a chosen place of worship for the wealthy of Cardiff earlier in the nineteenth century, when it would have been surrounded by fields on the western outskirts of the city. However, it also remained a local parish Church, containing the less remarkable graves of ordinary local people as shown by the archaeological evidence and inscriptions on the few remaining gravestones.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Bryn and Jeff Pithers for their patience on site and to the members of the congregation for imparting their extensive knowledge about St Margaret's. Thanks also to Jonathan Saunders for his help and advice throughout the project.



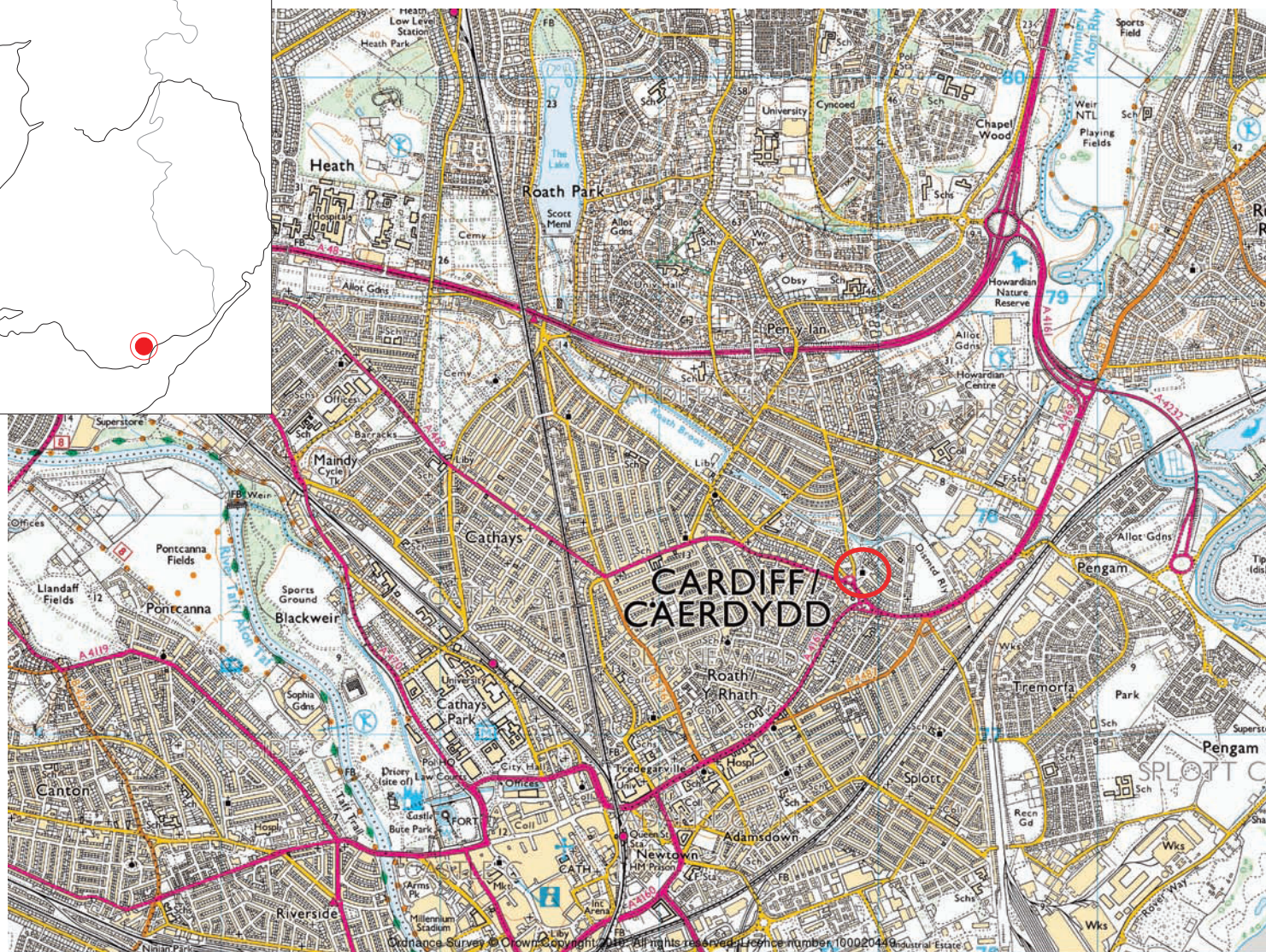
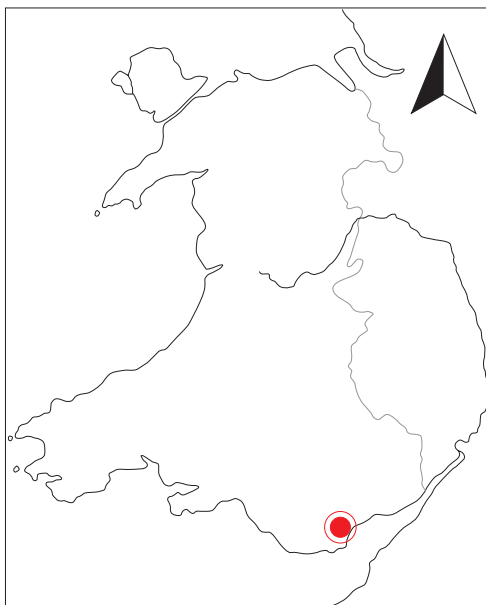


Fig. 1  
Location of  
site

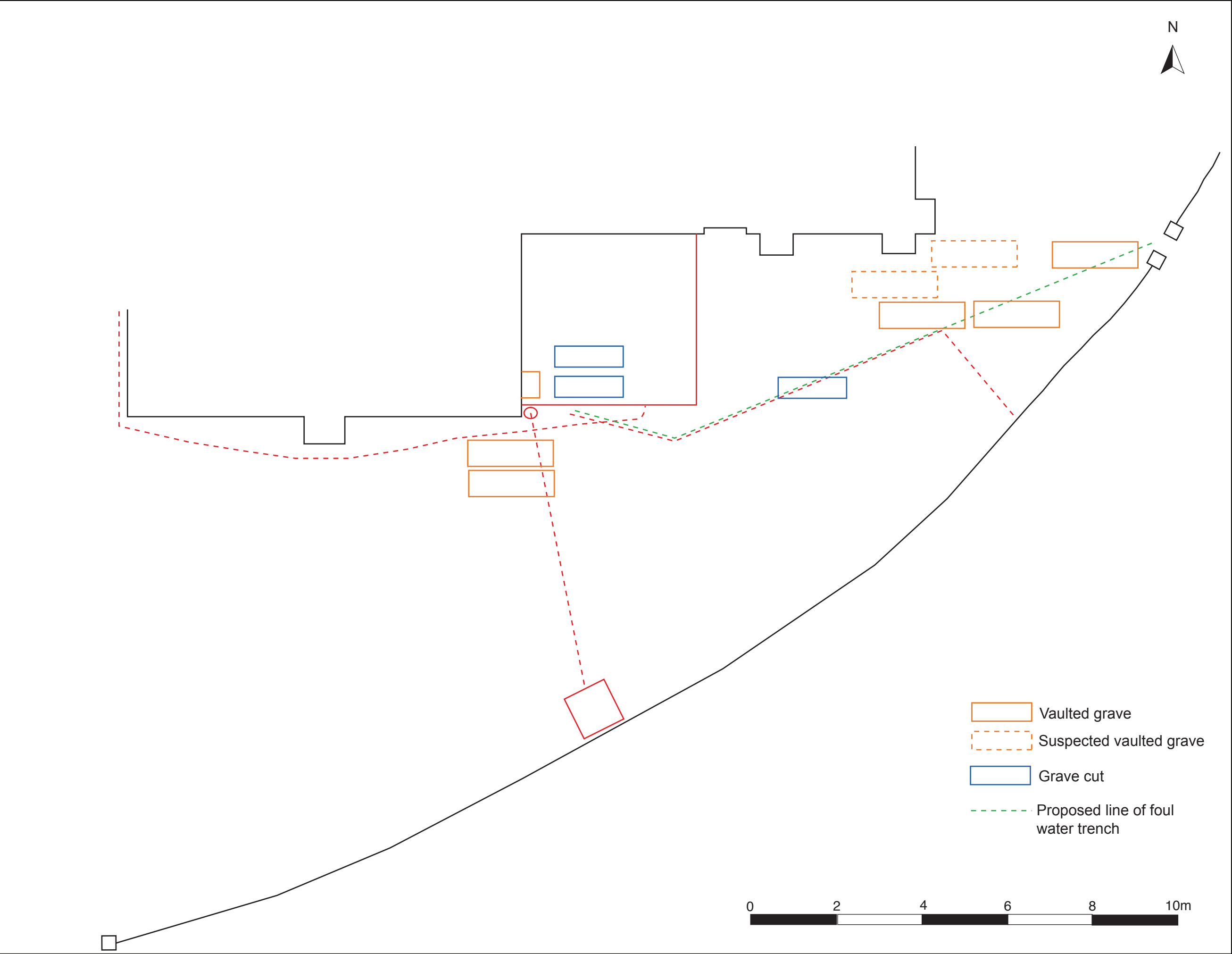


Fig. 2  
Location of the drainage  
works and graves





Fig. 3  
Toilet extension  
trench





Fig. 4  
Vault within the  
toilet extension  
trench





Fig. 5  
View north along  
the trench for the  
electricity cable





Fig. 6  
Brick-built vaults  
within the drainage  
trench





Fig. 7  
Soakaway Trench



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