

Refurbishment of Alne Church was carried out in 2011 providing a servery in the North Aisle and a new floor and toilet in the Tower. Mr Colin Briden provided archaeological supervision and the fieldwork was carried out by On Site Archaeology whose report is enclosed

# St Mary's Church, Alne Archaeology

Report by On-Site  
Archaeology

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SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN, ALNE.

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UPDATED REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

OSA REPORT No: OSA11WB25

November 2011



**OSA**

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**ON SITE ARCHÆOLOGY LTD**

25A Milton Street • York • North Yorkshire • YO10 3EP  
telephone • 01904 411673 • fax • 01904 414522 • mobile • 07767 385766  
e-mail • [onsitearchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:onsitearchaeology@gmail.com) • website • [www.onsitearchaeology.co.uk](http://www.onsitearchaeology.co.uk)  
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**Report Summary.**

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**REPORT NO:** OSA11WB25**SITE NAME:** St Mary the Virgin Church, Alne**COUNTY:** North Yorkshire**NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE:** SE 4950 6535**ON BEHALF OF:** Parochial Church Council  
St Mary The Virgin  
Alne  
North Yorkshire**TEXT:** Alex Sotheran**GRAPHICS:** Dave Pinnock**FIELDWORK:** Bernie McCluskey  
Jim O'Brien,  
Alex Sotheran**TIMING:** Fieldwork: July to September 2011  
Report preparation: November 2011**ENQUIRIES TO:** Nick Pearson  
On-Site Archaeology  
25A Milton Street  
York  
YO10 3EP*tel* (01904) 411673*fax* (01904) 414522*mobile* (07767) 385766*e-mail* onsitearchaeology@gmail.com*web* www.onsitearchaeology.co.uk**PERIODS REPRESENTED:** Medieval, Post-medieval

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## Table of Contents.

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1.0 Abstract .....	4
2.0 Site Location .....	6
3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background. ....	6
4.0 Methodology .....	7
5.0 Results .....	9
6.0 Discussion and Conclusions .....	15
7.0 Appendix 1 - List of Contexts. ....	16
8.0 Appendix 2 - Archive Index .....	17
9.0 Appendix 3 - The Plates. ....	19

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## List of Figures.

---

Figure 1. Site Location (NGR SE 4950 6535) .....	5
Figure 2. Plan of site showing trench locations.....	8
Figure 3. The earliest features in the tower .....	10
Figure 4. West facing section through the centre of the excavated area .....	11
Figure 5. Early flooring below the original floor .....	12
Figure 6. Plan of trench 4 .....	14

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## List of Plates.

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Plate 1. The tower floor fully excavated .....	19
Plate 2. Cobble foundations .....	19
Plate 3. Architectural stone in situ.....	20
Plate 4. Disturbance (106).....	21
Plate 5. Brick floor 107 .....	21
Plate 6. Skeleton 403 .....	22
Plate 7. Excavating trench 5 .....	22

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## 1.0 Abstract.

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*An archaeological investigation was carried out during the construction of a new timber floor within the west tower of the parish church of St Mary The Virgin, Alne, North Yorkshire.*

*The excavation revealed the cobble foundations of the earlier, 12<sup>th</sup> century, tower. These early cobble foundations were constructed on a slightly different alignment to the current tower, which was built in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These were sealed by layers of ground make-up that are likely to relate to ground raising associated with the early modern reconstruction. Several cut features, including pits and post-holes are also likely to relate to this phase of reconstruction.*

*The investigation also revealed the early modern sequence of floors within the rebuilt tower. The floors had been repaired in a number of places, which may indicate that internal features within the tower have been removed.*

*Further investigation during drainage works externally revealed the skeleton of a juvenile and two possible grave cuts to the east of the church. These were not disturbed and were preserved in situ.*

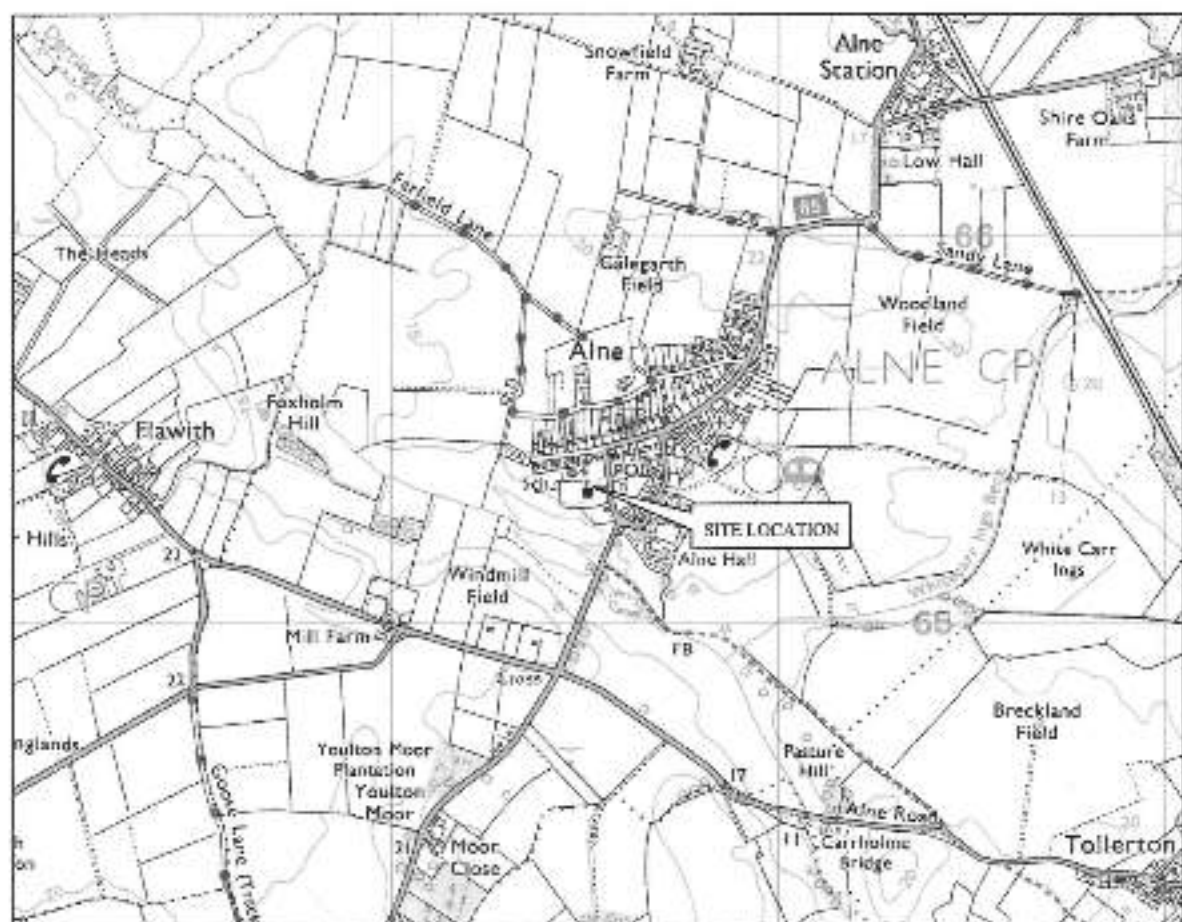


Figure 1. Site Location (NGR SE 4950 6535)

Reproduced from the 1997 Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.  
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## 2.0 Site Location

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The archaeological works covered by this report lay entirely within the west tower of the parish church of St Mary The Virgin, Alne. The church lies towards the southwest edge of the village, centred at National Grid Reference SE 4950 6535.

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## 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.

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At the time of the Domesday Survey 8 carucates at Alne were included in the lands of the Archbishop of York. Alne itself was waste in 1086, and later was included in the forest of Galtres. The vill was assigned, probably in the 12th century, together with Tollerton to the treasurer of St. Peter's, York, the two forming one manor in the liberty of St. Peter. Alne remained in the hands of the treasurer until the Dissolution, when he held the manor of Alne and Tollerton as well as the rectory manor of Alne, both of which came to the Crown, and were granted by Edward VI to Edward Duke of Somerset in 1547 (VCH. Volume 2).

The church itself dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, although substantial alterations and additions have been made in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The brick built west tower was constructed in 1766. (See VCH. Volume 2, and Pevsner, 1966 for detailed descriptions of the church).



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#### 4.0 Methodology.

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The main investigation was undertaken during the excavation for a footing for the construction of a wooden floor in the west tower of Aine church (Trench 1). All excavation was undertaken archaeologically by hand to a level of 0.35m below the modern floor surface. Three additional foundation trenches were then excavated a further 0.20m in depth. These trenches ran north to south across the floor of the tower and measured 0.25m wide.

Four further areas (Trenches 2-5) were impacted upon during additional drainage work outside at Aine Church (Figure 2).

Standard *On-Site Archaeology* techniques were followed throughout the investigation. This involved the completion of a context sheet for each deposit or cut encountered, along with plans and/or sections drawn to scale. In trenches lacking archaeological features, 1:50 scale plans were drawn showing the location of the sample section. In trenches containing archaeological features, 1:50 scale plans and, where necessary, 1:20 detail plans were drawn. Sections were drawn at 1:10 scale, although long sections were drawn at 1:20 scale when appropriate. Plans were tied in to the National Grid. A photographic record of the deposits and features was also maintained. A full list of detailed context description of all deposits recorded is provided within Appendix 1 and details of the archive are listed in Appendix 2.

All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the methodologies set out in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation*, and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), the *IFA Code of Conduct*, as well as with additional methodologies agreed with the City of York Archaeologist.



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## 5.0 Results.

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### 5.1 Trench 1

The natural sub-soils were not defined due to the nature of the level of impact within the west tower, but early features were identified during the work carried out in the tower (Plate 1). The earliest features that were extant within the area were what appeared to be original foundation structures (Figures 2 and 3). Three lengths of cobbling (142), (143) and (144) were identified as a possible foundation of the 12<sup>th</sup> century tower (Plate 2). The features proved to be slightly off alignment with the later tower construction and also wider than these footings (by approximately 0.40m in the south), demonstrating that they belonged to an earlier phase of building. A further large piece of masonry, (117=148), was noted to be bonded to the length of cobbles (142) on the southern extent. (117=148) measured 0.67 x 0.40 x 0.20m and was constructed of sandstone. The piece appeared to have been left in situ and keyed into the later tower modification (104). Although no dating evidence was retrieved from these structures, they underlay the large levelling deposit (138) which was associated with the later re-modelling of the tower. (138) was a mid reddish brown clay deposit containing occasional small stones (average size 0.03 x 0.02 x 0.01m) and charcoal flecks. The layer covered the entire area of the floor of the tower and sealed the earlier cobble structures. It appears that (138) had been used as a levelling deposit during later tower re-flooring, no finds were retrieved from (138) and its depth ran to below 0.30m. The full depth of the deposit was not realised as the level of impact ceased any further need for excavation.

The levelling deposit (138) was cut by several pits and features, [129], [131], [133], [137], [141], [147], [150] and [154], which had no stratigraphic relationships between them. [129] was a large 1m by 1m square pit that was 0.36m deep. The single fill, (128), was a mid reddish black mixed ashy clinker. The pit was considered to be a possible cut to house a floor slab in conjunction with an early western door. The two small possible post holes [131] and [133] lay close to [129] (to the east and south respectively) and were possibly in association with this feature. They were filled with (130) and (132) respectively, both sandy silts.

[137] was a large steep sided pit, 1m+ long, 0.50m+ wide and 0.22m+ deep cut into the north western corner of the tower. The full extent lay outside the excavation area so the dimensions were not fully realised. It was filled with the single fill (136) which was dark brownish grey sandy silt. It was very similar to the fill (128). The feature not only truncated the levelling deposit (138) but also the cobbles (143) and (144). [141] was the cut of a small possible fire pit located on the eastern edge of excavation with a length of 0.40m+ and width of 0.44m. It had a depth of 0.08m. The extent of the feature lay outside of the excavation area and was not fully realised. (140) was the single fill of [141] and was mid grey white mixed ash and silt, possibly the remains of in situ burning. The cut [147] was only identified in plan close to the northern extent of the tower and consisted of what appeared to be a circular post hole with a diameter of 0.52m. This feature was only identified at the level of impact so was unexcavated but two fills, (145) and (146) were noted. (145) was the secondary fill of [147] and consisted of light reddish black silty clay with frequent amounts of crushed shell. The primary fill,

(146) was very distinctly light blue and yellow clay, possibly used as a packing deposit. [150] was another circular cut, possibly for a posthole. It truncated both the levelling deposit (138) and the cobbles (142). It measured 0.20m in diameter and had an unknown depth as it was only identified at the lowest level of impact. A single fill, (149), was made up of dark brownish black silty clay and ash. The cut [154] was only identified in the eastern section of the tower and its full extent lay beyond the excavation area. It was seen to be 1m+ wide and 1m+ long with a depth of 0.18m. It was filled with sand (153) and was possibly used as a bedding surface for a lintel or doorstep. It lay directly below the red brick surface (100) and was no association with any other contexts was ascertained.

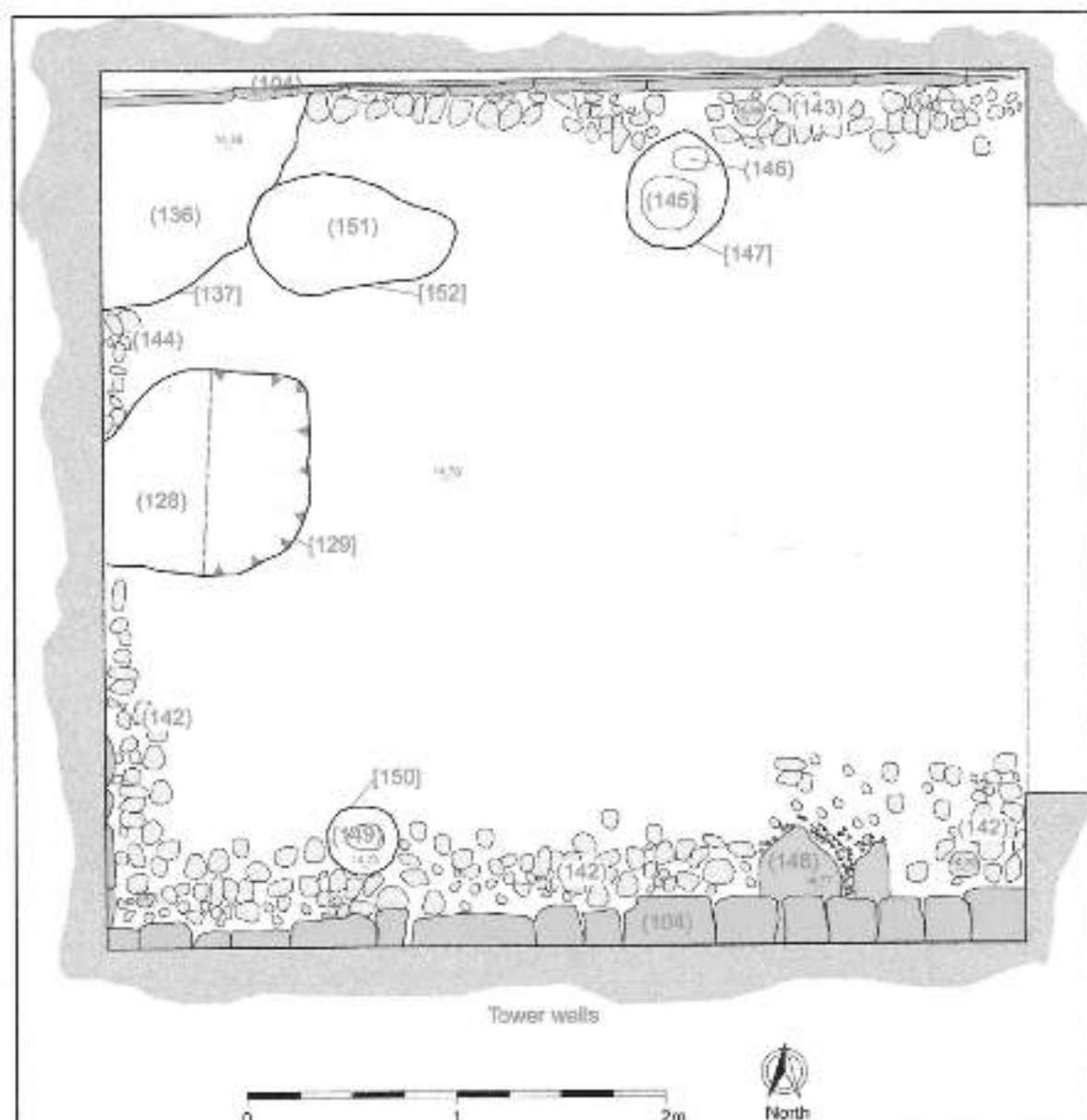


Figure 3. The earliest features in the tower

In the south eastern corner of the tower several contexts were identified, (122) was a dark brown sandy silt layer similar to (121) but more compact. Within the layer (121) a large architectural stone was recorded as (120). It measured 0.56m x 0.31 x 0.12m and was not in situ (Plate 3). These deposits were overlain by the possible lime and mortar floor surface

(119). (119) was in turn cut by the possible robber trench [118] which was 0.84m long and 0.62m wide. [118] was filled by (116) which was light yellow brown sandy silt. A bedding deposit of dark greyish brown clayey silty sand, (115–134), sat above (119), this was a bedding deposit for the cobblestone surface (114) and the red brick surface (113). These two surfaces butted one another and the stratigraphic relationship was impossible to ascertain. They both lay in the south west corner of the tower and were truncated by the concrete slab (102) to the north and the foundation cut [105] to the south and west. The deposit (119) was also overlain with the remains of a brick floor (109) made up of no less than nine bricks with an average size of 0.24 x 0.11 x 0.04m. (109) was possibly the remains of another brick floor (107), which had been truncated by the large concrete slab (102).

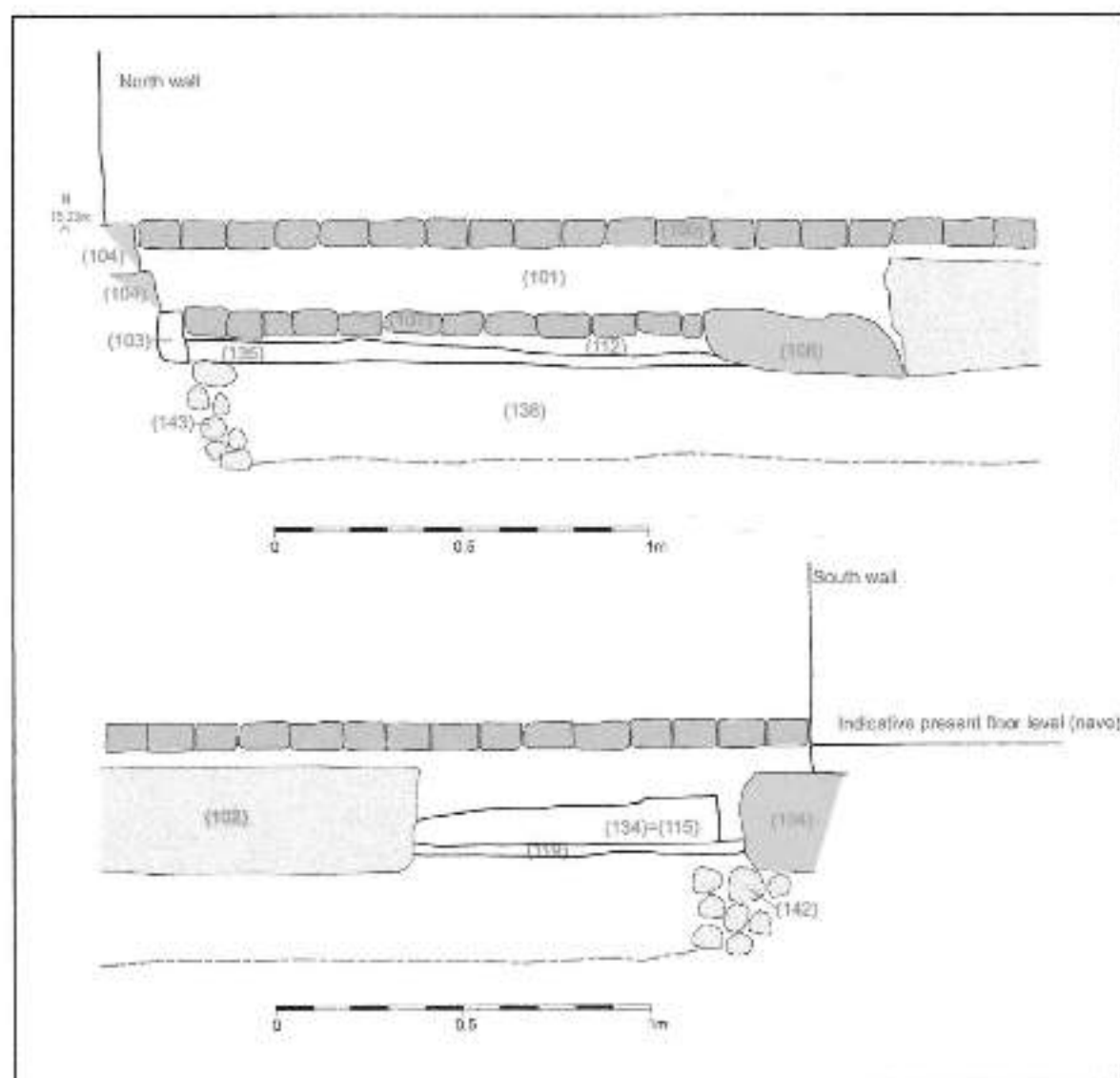


Figure 4. West facing section through the centre of the excavated area

In the North West corner of the tower a further small pit [152] truncated the pit [137] and measured 0.91 x 0.65m with an unknown depth. It was unexcavated as it was at the level of impact. (151) was the single dark reddish black ashy clay fill and indicated some form of burning. This feature, along with [137] and [147] were overlain in the northern extent of the tower by the deposit (135) a dark greenish brown mixed sandy and silt. This appeared to be a





charcoal. The floor surface (107) was also disturbed in the north west corner and filled with the raised brick surface (106) (Plate 4). These bricks were laid in a haphazard manner for an unknown purpose. This area of disturbance was butted by the fill (110) and sandstone blocks (111). (110) was a dark greyish black coal and was possibly associated with burning. The stratigraphic sequence of (106), (110) and (111) was not possible to ascertain with any clarity.

The cut [105] truncated the surfaces (106), (107), (113) and (114). [105] was the foundation cut for the sandstone blocks (104) which formed the base of the tower. These foundations were 0.25m deep and were filled with the mid brownish grey clayey sandy silt (103). That the cut truncated the red brick surface (107) pointed to the conclusion that the tower had undergone major reconstruction work post the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Truncating the red brick surface (107) and butting up against the western extent of the tower and the foundation blocks (104) was a large 'L' shaped modern concrete slab (102). Above this was a bedding layer of sand (101) that formed a surface for a red brick surface (100) that sat directly below the modern floor surface of the western tower.

## 5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 as positioned in the west of the church interior, but east of the tower entrance and measured 2.80m by 2.60m. The flagstone floor of the church was removed to reveal a brick floor (201) consisting of bricks of an average size of 0.22 x 0.12 x 0.05m. It was very similar to the floor surface (107) in the West Tower. This was removed and was sat upon (202) which was mixed gritty sandy clay. (202) was made ground and a bedding layer for (201). No further work carried out in this trench as the impact level did not go below the brick layer.

## 5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was an L shaped trench cut for a water pipe to the west of the tower exterior. From north to south it measured 7.80m and from east to west it measured 6.90m. The width of the trench was 0.30m and the depth was 0.60m. Three contexts were identified, (301), (302) and (303). (301) was mid brown top soil that consisted of soft loamy earth with frequent roots. It was measured to a depth of 0.30m. (302) was soft mid reddish brown silty clay sub soil. This was unexcavated beyond 0.30m so the full depth is unknown. (303) was a large modern concrete base with four equally spaced post holes cut into the surface. It was unexcavated so the full extent of it was unknown.

## 5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 10m long by 0.90m wide and was levelled off at a depth of about 1.00m along the base. The trench was intended to house a covered soak away. Seven contexts were identified along the length of trench beginning with (401) which was soft mid greyish brown silty clay with frequent roots. It was the topsoil overlying the graveyard and contained several disarticulated human remains. It was 0.30m deep. (402) was identified as the subsoil and was not fully excavated so the full depth was not realised. It was mid reddish brown silty clay. Two features were identified as being cut into this layer, namely [405] and [407] along with an inhumation (403). (403) was the inhumation of an infant or child (Plate 6). It was a

supine east to west burial with the head slightly tilted to the south. Although the condition of the bone was of a good to medium state the body was heavily truncated to the east with the pelvic region and lower arm missing. These were probably cut through by the western extent of the grave [405], but this was difficult to discern due to the ground conditions. The grave cut of the burial for (403) was equally difficult to identify and was not recorded. [405] was identified as a possible grave cut that measured approximately 1.80m by 0.20m+ along an east to west axis. It was unexcavated as it was only identified at the level of impact and also ran into the southern edge of excavation. (404) was the single fill of [405] and was a firm dark brown silty clay which contained fragmentary human remains which were not excavated due to the level of impact. The full length of [405] was not fully realised as it was very difficult to see the cut in the ground conditions. A similar problem was encountered with [407], a further grave cut. This was measured as 1.10m long and 0.18m wide. This feature ran into northern edge of excavation and was not fully recorded. The single fill, (406), was firm dark brown silty clay with fragmentary skeletal remains. This feature was not excavated as it was identified only on the level of impact.

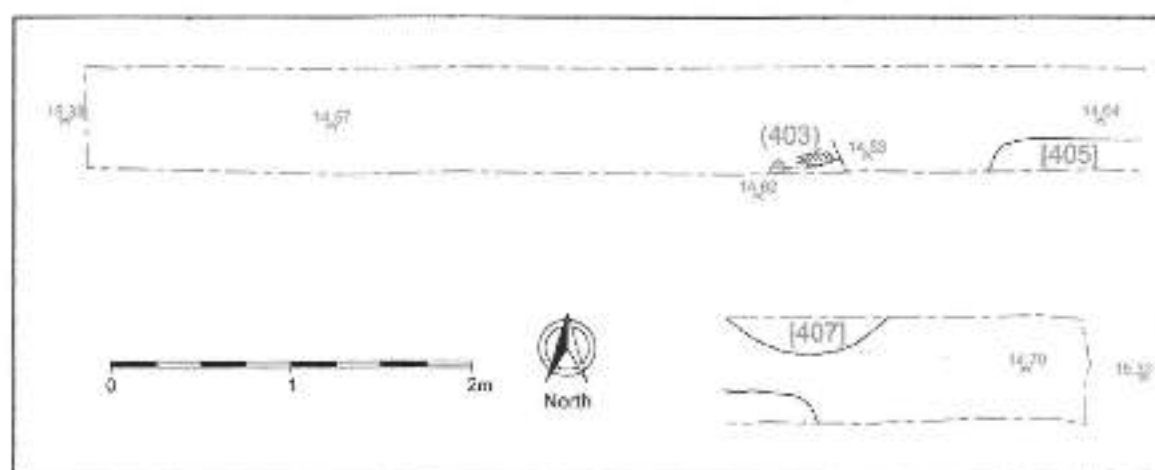


Figure 6. Plan of trench 4

### 5.5 Trench 5

There was a 60m long drainage cut for a water pipe that ran almost the entire length of the graveyard from east to west with a right angled turn close to trenches 3 and 4 (Plate 7). It was cut to a width of 0.30m and a depth of 0.60m along its length. (500) was a 0.30m deep deposit of dark brownish grey loamy soil including turf. (500) was the graveyard modern topsoil and contained several disarticulated human remains. (501) was dark brown loamy soil, very similar to (500) but with no turf and was subsoil, this layer also contained a large amount of disarticulated human remains. This was only excavated to a depth of 0.30m so a full depth was not realised. (502) was a mix of modern brick and concrete footing for grave slabs laid at the entrance of the church. It had a maximum depth of 0.30m and overlay (501).



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## 6.0 Discussion and Conclusions

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The investigation has provided an opportunity to identify and record the various layers of archaeological build up in the west tower of Alne Church.

The earliest feature recorded was the foundation of the original, presumably 12<sup>th</sup> century, church tower. This foundation was constructed using unbonded cobbles and was built on a slightly different alignment to the current tower. The interior of the original tower may have also been slightly smaller than the subsequent rebuild, or the foundations were substantially wider than the above ground walls.

The foundations were sealed by a thick layer of make-up that is likely to relate to ground raising associated with the early modern reconstruction. Several cut features, including pits and post-holes are also likely to relate to this phase of reconstruction.

The investigation also revealed the early modern sequence of floors within the rebuilt tower. The floors had been constructed with a combination of cobbles, brick and stone. This variation in materials indicates that the floors had been repaired in a number of places, which may suggest that internal features within the tower have been removed.

The discovery of the early foundation level gives a better understanding of the development of the tower since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The slight change in alignment and expansion of the base of the tower was also evidenced by the archaeological work and serves to increase knowledge of the history of Alne Church.

Beyond the tower itself, the only feature of note was the discovery of a single skeleton in trench 4. This was the burial of a child and was found in the base of the trench and was left in situ. Two other features were also found in the base of the trench, likely to be grave cuts.

## 7.0 Appendix 1 ~ List of Contexts.

Context no.	Description	Thickness	Extent
100	Red brick floor		Area
101	Light brownish yellow sand	0.18m	Area
102	Concrete foundation		
103	Mid brown grey clayey sandy silt	0.25m+	0.20m
104	Sandstone blocks, foundation of west tower		
105	Construction cut for tower foundation	0.25m+	0.20m
106	Red brick surface		
107	Red brick surface		
108	UNUSED		
109	Red brick floor		
110	Dark greyish black coal	0.02m	
111	Sandstone blocks		
112	Light brown silty sand	0.03m	
113	Red brick floor		
114	Cobblestone surface	0.20m	
115	Dark greyish brown clayey silty sand (same as (134))	0.03m	
116	Light yellowish brown sandy silt	0.84m	0.62m
117	Limestone masonry same as 148	0.20m	0.67m
118	'robber' trench cut		
119	Mixed greyish brown sandy silt		
120	Limestone architectural stone	0.31m	0.56m
121	Dark greyish brown sandy silt		
122	Dark brown sandy silt		
123	Truncation cut through (107) floor surface		
124	Mid reddish brown sandy silt	0.10m	1.15m
125	Truncation cut through (107) floor surface	0.10m	1.15m
126	Dark brown sandy silt	0.33m	0.20m
127	Post hole cut	0.33m	0.20m
128	Mid reddish black ashy clinker	0.36m	1m
129	Steep sided cut for floor slab	0.36m	1m
130	Dark grey sandy silt	0.12m	0.22m
131	Square posthole cut	0.12m	0.22m
132	Dark grey sandy silt	0.10m	0.16m
133	Sub rectangular posthole cut	0.10m	0.16m
134	Dark brownish grey sandy silt with clay patches	0.15m	2.12m
135	Dark greenish brown mixed sand and silt	0.10m	4.40m
136	Dark brownish grey sandy silt	0.22m	0.60m+
137	Small pit cut	0.22m	0.60m+
138	Mid reddish brown clay	0.10m	Area
139	Light brownish yellow mortar	0.05m	0.70m+
140	Mid greyish white ash mixed with silt	0.08m	0.44m
141	Pit cut	0.08m	0.44m
142	Cobble foundations		
143	Cobble foundations		
144	Cobble foundations		
145	Light reddish black silty clay	Unex'd	0.30m
148	Light bluish yellow sandy clay	Unex'd	0.52m

147	Possible post hole cut	Unex'd	0.52m
148	Limestone masonry same as 117	0.20m	0.67m
149	Dark brownish black silty clay and ash	Unex'd	0.20m
150	Possible post hole cut	Unex'd	0.20m
151	Dark reddish black mixed ash and clay	Unex'd	0.91m
152	Possible fire pit cut	Unex'd	0.91m
153	Light brownish yellow sand	0.18m	1.00m+
154	Sub rectangular cut	0.18m	1.00m+

## 8.0 Appendix 2 ~ Archive Index.

### 8.1 Drawing Register.

Drawing no.	Description	Scale	Initials	Date
1	Post-ex plan after removal of brick floor	1:20	BJMcC	19/07/11
2	West facing section of tower	1:20	BJMcC	20/07/11
3	East facing section of [129]	1:10	Alex	27/07/11
4	Post-ex plan of features cutting (135)	1:20	Alex	22/08/11
5	Cobble foundations (142), (143) and (144)	1:20	JO'B	29/07/11
6	East facing section of trench 1	1:20	Alex	01/08/11
7	Sketch plan of trench locations within tower	Not to scale	Alex	02/08/11
8	West facing section of trench 3	1:20	JO'B	02/08/11
9	Trench 4	1:20	Alex	12.9.11
10	Annotated site plan	-	Alex	12.9.11

### 8.2 Photographic Register.

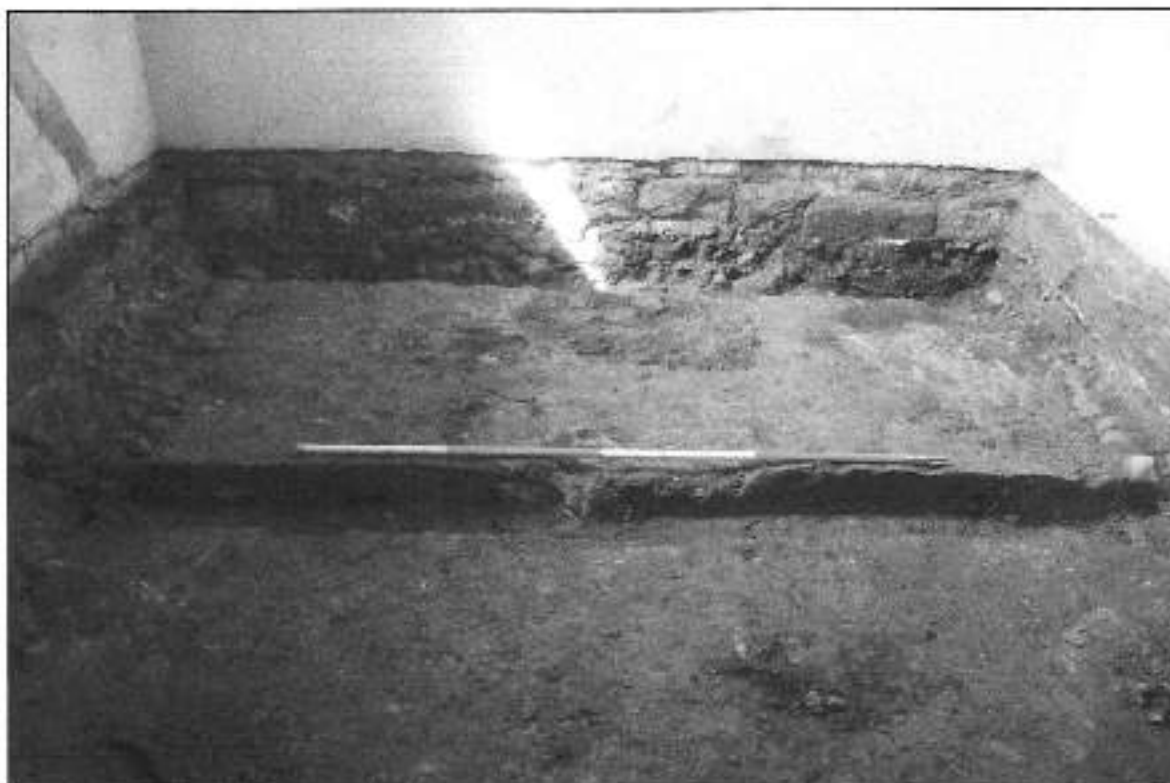
Frame no.	Description	View	Scale	Initials and date
<i>Digital download 22/07/11</i>				
1-2	ID shot	n/a	n/a	BJMcC 19/07/11
3-20	Brick floor (107)	Various	2m/1m	BJMcC 19/07/11
21-28	Brick floor (107)	Various	2m/1m	BJMcC 20/07/11
30-44	Cobblestone surface (114) and bricks (113)	W	1m	BJMcC 20/07/11
45-48	Section 2	NE	1m	BJMcC 21/07/11
49-55	Architectural stone from [123]	n/a	0.5m	BJMcC 21/07/11
56-59	Brick floor in WD Tr 2	E	1m	Alex 22/07/11
<i>Digital download 27/07/11</i>				
1-2	Pre-ex after concrete with flash	NW	2m	Alex 26/07/11
3-4	Pre-ex after concrete without flash	NW	2m	Alex 26/07/11
5-6	Pre-ex after concrete with flash	SW	2m	Alex 26/07/11
7-8	Pre-ex after concrete without flash	SW	2m	Alex 26/07/11
9-10	Pre-ex after concrete with flash	W	2m	Alex 26/07/11
11-12	Pre-ex after concrete without flash	W	2m	Alex 26/07/11
13-14	[129] East facing section without flash	W	1m	Alex 27/07/11
15-17	[129] East facing section with flash	W	1m	Alex 27/07/11
<i>Digital download 02/08/11</i>				
1-2	[129] East facing section with flash	W	1m	Alex 28/07/11
3-4	[129] East facing section without flash	W	1m	Alex 28/07/11
5-6	Working shots	n/a	n/a	Alex 28/07/11
7-8	West facing section of tower (southern half) w/o flash	E	1m	Alex 28/07/11
9-10	West facing section of tower (southern half) w/ flash	E	1m	Alex 28/07/11

11-12	West facing section of tower (northern half) w/o flash	E	1m	Alex 28/07/11
13-14	West facing section of tower (northern half) w/ flash	E	1m	Alex 28/07/11
15-18	East facing section of [141]	W	1m	JO'B 28/07/11
19-20	Post-ex of level of impact	W	2m	Alex 29/07/11
21-22	Cobbles (142)	SW	2m	Alex 29/07/11
23-24	Cobbles (142)	SE	2m	Alex 29/07/11
25-26	Cobbles (143)	NW	2m	Alex 29/07/11
27-28	Cobbles (143)	NE	2m	Alex 29/07/11
29-30	Tr.1 east facing section without flash	W	2m	Alex 01/08/11
31-32	Tr.1 east facing section with flash	W	2m	Alex 01/08/11
33-34	Detail shots of Tr.1	W	2m	Alex 01/08/11
35-36	Tr.2 east facing section	W	2m	Alex 01/08/11
37-38	Detail shots of Tr.2	W	2m	Alex 01/08/11
39-40	Tr.3 west facing section with flash	E	2m	JO'B 02/08/11
41-42	Tr.3 west facing section without flash	E	2m	JO'B 02/08/11
43-46	Detail shots of Tr.3 with flash	E	2m	JO'B 02/08/11
47-50	Detail shots of Tr.3 without flash	E	2m	JO'B 02/08/11
Digital download 16.9.11				
1-59	Various shots of external drainage works	-	-	AS

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## 9.0 Appendix 3 ~ The Plates.

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*Plate 1. The tower floor fully excavated*



*Plate 2. Cobble foundations*

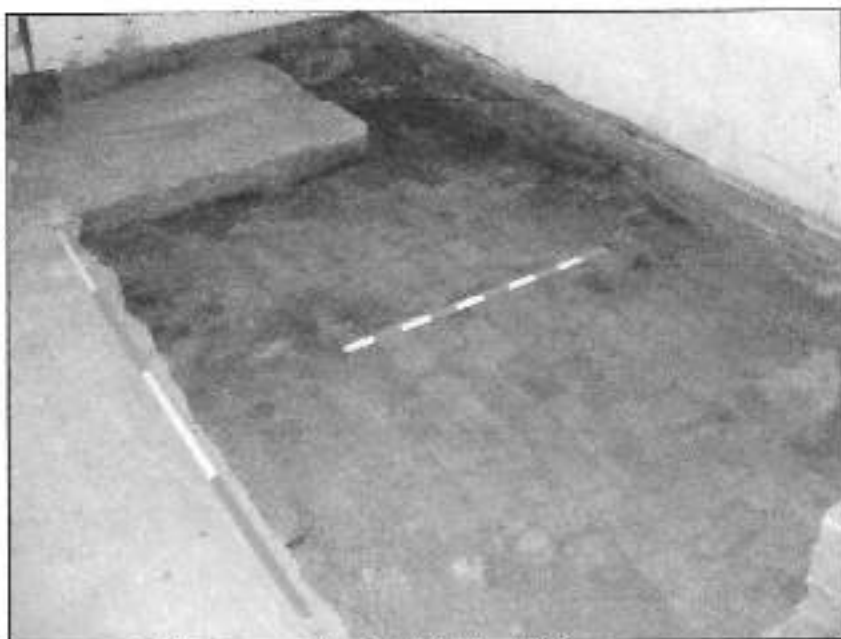


Plate 3. Architectural stone in situ





*Plate 4. Disturbance (106)*



*Plate 5. Brick floor 107*



Plate 6. Skeleton 403



Plate 7. Excavating trench 5