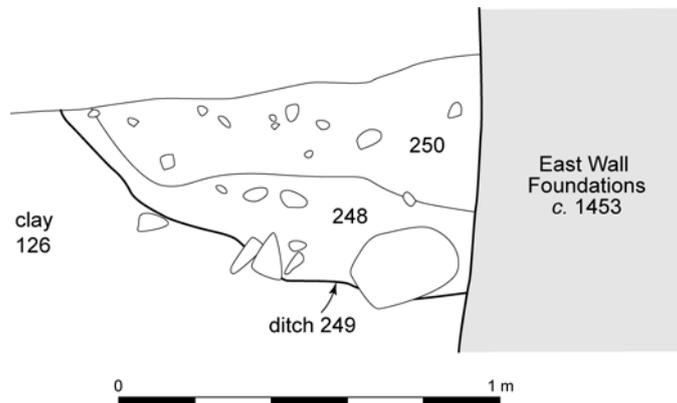

4 The Archaeological Investigations

Throughout this report, excavated contexts are referred to by the prefix C, skeletons by SK and special finds by SF. Contexts from areas other than the South Choir Aisle excavations are also prefixed by the code ESG and the year of investigation, or ECV for the 1981 excavation in the Choir Vestry.

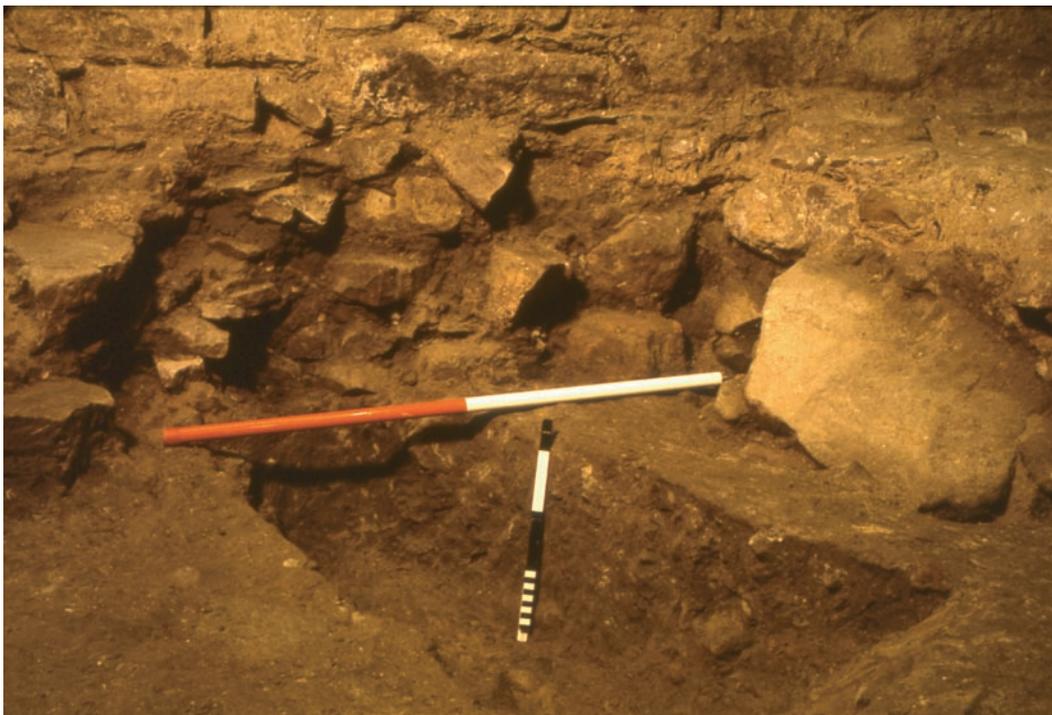
For the main excavations in the South Choir Aisle, four broad chronological periods of activity could be defined, three of which (Periods 1–3) date from the 12th to mid-16th centuries. The excavated evidence included structural remains relating to the development of the medieval kirk, and a total of 113 *in situ*

burials. Period 4 encompasses the centuries from the Reformation to the 20th century.

Within the report, these chronological periods are prefixed by P (ie P1–4). Within Periods 2 and 3, five discrete episodes of burials could also be identified as phases, and these are prefixed by BP (ie BP1–5).



Illus 7 Section through Period 2a ditch (C249)



Illus 8 Section across Period 2a ditch (C249) and relationship with Period 3a east wall footings (C246)

4.1 Excavations in the South Choir Aisle, 1981

4.1.1 Period 1: ?12th century

After the conclusion of the archaeological excavation, underpinning of the foundations of the east and south walls of the church was carried out by building contractors. During this work, two flat stone slabs with mortar between them were discovered by the contractors at a depth of some 5m below the modern church floor level (at c 84.35m AOD), and almost beneath the standing east wall. As the conditions (a metre-wide trench, cut against the

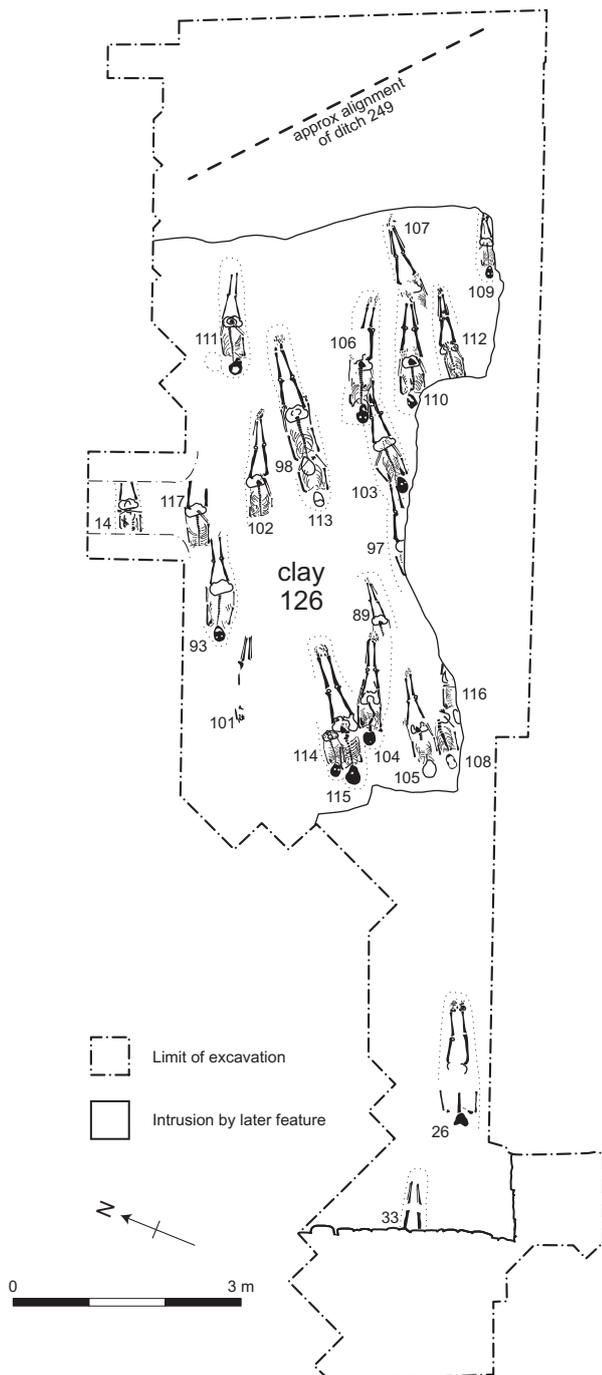
inner face of the E wall of the church) were unsuitable for further archaeological investigation, it was impossible to record anything but their presence and that they were sealed by clay deposit (C126). No evidence to assist in dating the remains was recovered or observed.

4.1.2 Period 2a: 12th/13th century (*illus 7–10*)

Above the stone slabs was a deep deposit of boulder clay (C126), of varying depth across the site, with an upper surface sloping slightly downwards towards the south. Although the clay was excavated in a number of places to a depth of a metre at the conclusion of the excavation and was then considered to be natural, the presence of the mortared stones beneath it, and the clearly redeposited character of similar material encountered in the South Transept (below), show that it was in fact redeposited. No dating material was recovered from the clay.

The earliest feature post-dating this deposit was represented by the heel of a ditch (C249; *illus 7*), located at the bottom of the foundation trench of the original, late 14th-century, east wall of the present church building (*illus 8*). This ditch heel ran approximately north-west to south-east, emerging from beneath the existing east wall of the church, and ran across the base of the construction trench at a slight angle, distinctly different from the alignment of the existing church building (*illus 9*). It would be illogical to assume that this was dug and refilled at the time of the laying of the foundations, and it must therefore be regarded as the surviving portion of a ditch dug from pre-church ground level and partially destroyed by the digging of the construction trench for the earliest east wall of the extended medieval church. It did not share the same alignment as any of the later church buildings and its course would eventually have taken it outside the line of the robber trench to both north and south (beyond the excavated area). Its original dimensions were not ascertainable, as its eastern edge lay beneath the east wall of the church but at the point where it was sectioned it survived to a depth of 0.7m and was filled with layers of hard grey clay and soft grey/brown clay, separated by a thin layer of yellow sand (C248). The surface of the redeposited boulder clay (C126) to the west of the ditch section was almost 2m higher than the bottom of the trench. The excavator considered that, if allowance were made for the probable presence of soil deposits above the boulder clay, and for the surviving depth of the ditch heel, the ditch when dug must have approached 3m in depth. However, the absence of such soil deposits within the excavated area may suggest a slightly shallower but still substantial ditch, c 2.70m deep and of considerable width.

The redeposited boulder clay (C126) formed the matrix for the earliest sets of excavated burials, totalling 44 (*illus 9*). Of these, 15 were definitely assignable to the first phase of burial (BP1) of the cemetery, and were cut directly into the surface of the



Illus 9 Period 2a, Burial Phase 1



Illus 10 Burial Phase 1 graves cut into clay platform (C126), looking west

boulder clay, with no evidence for any accumulated or deposited soil or other material over the upper surface of the clay (*illus 10*). Two alignments were discernible within the burials: one, shared by most of the burials, was at right angles to the line of the ditch (C249); the other was that of the church building.

The fills of the graves of this early phase were sealed by a thin layer of soft, light brown silt (C175), containing midden material including East Coast White Gritty Ware pottery, some medieval tile and a small quantity of animal bone. This layer was only located in the southern (downhill) area of the site, particularly towards the south-east, and on its surface was an area of stone chippings apparently forming a path (C196), again apparently aligned at right angles to the ditch.

A further 19 graves (BP2; *illus 11*) were then cut into the boulder clay from above C175 and C196, and in the area to the north, where these layers were not found, were a further ten graves which could fall into either phase, and which have been assigned to Burial Phases 1–2. Again all these graves had one or other of the two alignments identified in BP1, with those aligned on the ditch again the majority.

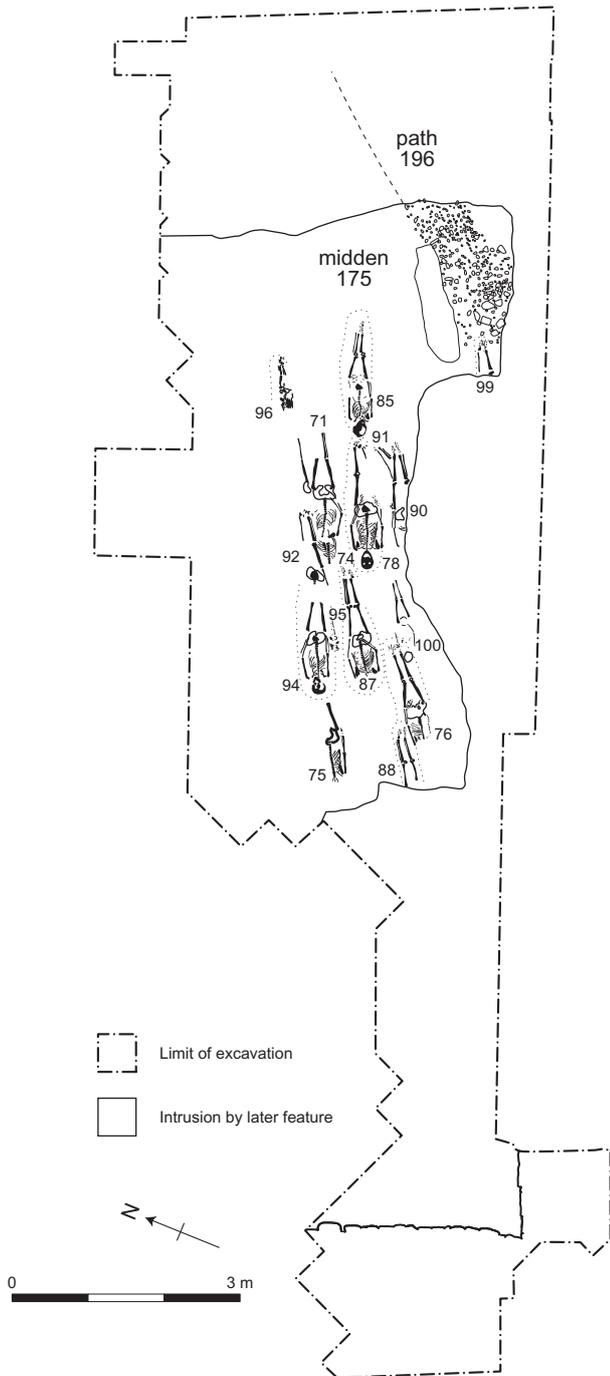
4.1.3 Period 2b: 13th/14th century (*illus 12*; *illus 13*)

All these deposits and graves were sealed by substantial deposits of dark loamy soil, the upper limits

of which, as excavated, formed a more or less horizontal surface across the site. It was clear, however, that this had been produced by levelling at the time of the construction of the late medieval church in the 14th century, and the original upper level and surface topography of these deposits is unknown. There were clear variations in the character of the deposits but it was clear that they formed a single episode of land-forming and make-up in level of the cemetery area. A great deal of midden material (C84) was found incorporated within the make-up at the eastern area of the excavated trench and a rather lesser concentration at the west end (C39). In the central area, the soil was almost completely without finds (C31). These variations, and the clear presence of other discrete deposits within the excavated area in this period, demonstrate that the artefactual and faunal material recovered, including more than 200 sherds of medieval East Coast White Gritty Ware, fragments of medieval floor tile and a piece of a late 13th- to mid-14th-century glass vessel, should be considered as imported to the site as part of a clear episode of deliberate raising of the ground level in this area.

Into this deposit were cut the graves for 30 burials (BP3, *illus 12*; *illus 13*). As with the graves of BP1 and BP2, these burials showed slight variations in alignment, but most skeletons again were apparently aligned on the ditch as the dominant feature.

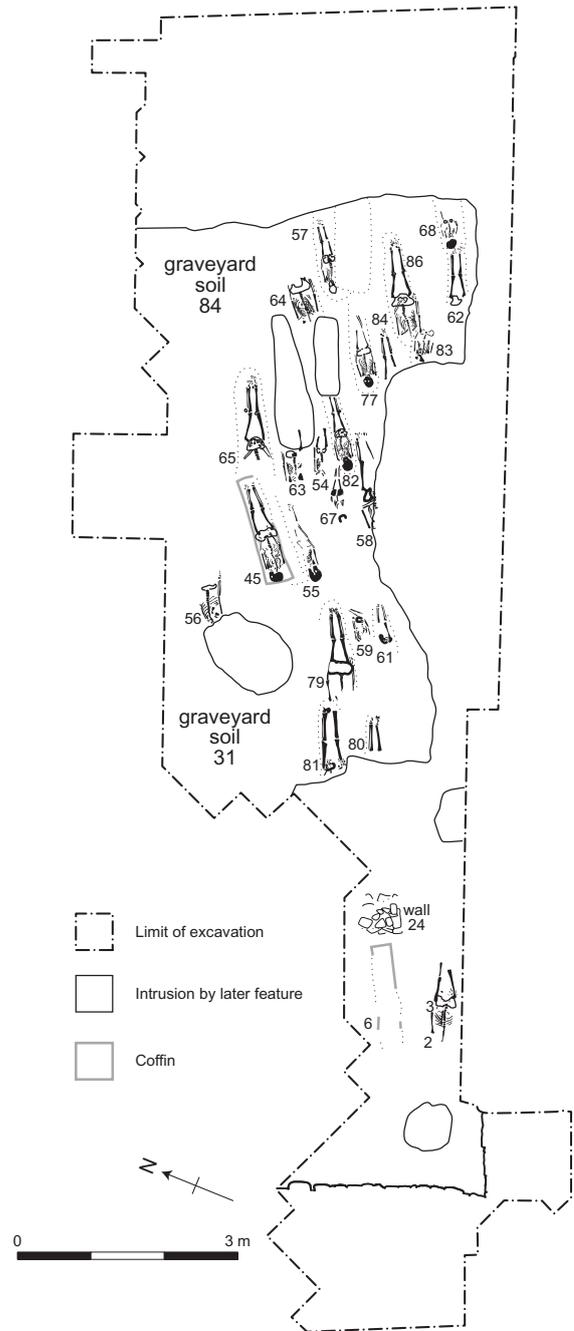
Two burials (*illus 13*, SK31 and SK43), which lay immediately adjacent to each other, were notable for the presence of identical unusual finds within the



Illus 11 Period 2a, Burial Phase 2

grave fills. Each contained a wooden baton within the grave fill, in direct association with the body; for SK31 (a female), it lay on the pelvis (*illus 14*), perhaps originally held in the hands; the baton with SK43 (a male) lay on the feet (*illus 15*). SK31 was contained in a wooden coffin, but SK43 was not.

The earliest stone-built feature within the excavated area, dating from before the extension of the church, was part of a mortared wall (C24) running north–south at a point just to the east of the junction of the third and fourth bays of the later aisle. Its width was *c.* 0.6m, and only *c.* 0.5m of its length had survived later demolition and robbing.

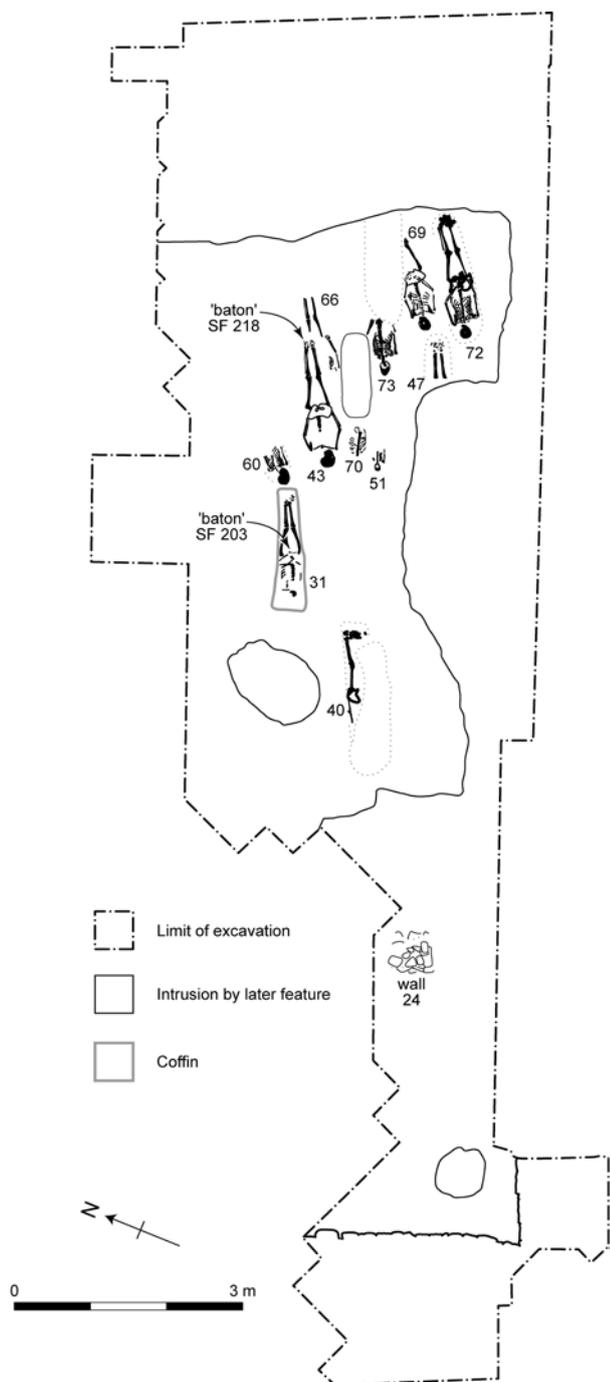


Illus 12 Period 2b, Burial Phase 3

The foundations of the later, south wall of the aisle butted up against its east face, with the remains of the earlier structure incorporated into the foundations at that point. Burials dating from after the construction of the church (Period 3 below) had been cut through by a trench for the robbing of wall C24.

4.1.4 Period 3a: late 14th to mid-15th century (*illus 16–20*)

Sealing all the burials and deposits of the cemetery of Period 2 were deposits associated with the extension



Illus 13 Period 2b, Burial Phase 3

of the medieval church to the south and east. These deposits had suffered a considerable amount of disturbance as a result both of later alterations to the church building and of the insertion of burials within the church, beneath the floor of the aisle. As far as could be deduced, the sequence of events and associated features/levels was as follows.

The foundations of the south wall (C149; *illus 16*) of the Choir Aisle were exposed at one point only in the main excavation, for reasons of structural safety. The foundation trench (C151) cut through the deposits of Period 2 and was *c* 0.65m wide at the top at this point, tapering to *c* 0.30m at its base, with

a surviving depth of *c* 1.10m. Four rubble masonry foundation courses projected 0.10m from the face of the wall above. The original south wall was also seen in a geotechnical trial pit in 1977 (shown as TP wall 3 on *illus 17*, and in section on *illus 18*).

To the east, the ditch (C249) must have been filled in at this period at the latest, because when the church was first extended to include this area, its east wall stood approximately 2.5m to the west of its present position, directly over the fill of the ditch. The foundation trench (C9) for this original east wall of the south aisle extended 2.9m westwards from the face of the later (current) east wall, tapering inwards at the west face to 2.5m at its base, which lay *c* 2.0–2.5m below the level from which it had been cut. At the bottom of the trench, only the lowest foundation course (C246) of the wall had survived intact with its facing stones, although above this, in the south-east corner of the trench, a mass of stones, mortar and clay forming the wall core survived above foundation level (*illus 19*; *illus 20*). Pink sandstone blocks predominated in this structure, but there were also a few very large fragments of grey whinstone. Some of the large stones forming the western facing edge of the foundation course had been re-used from an earlier structure, including one with a face carved on one end. This carving had suffered some mutilation, but its large eyes and the surviving part of the nose identify it as a grotesque mask corbel of 12th-century Romanesque work (see *illus 45* below).

The western face of this original east wall corresponds exactly with the projected length of the original presbytery, using the bay width of the westernmost (third, fourth and fifth bays) of the rest of the aisle as the unit of measurement (this projection is shown on *illus 17*), confirming that the aisle was extended as a single planned event, at the same time as the rest of the Choir.

At the same time as the construction of this wall, when the extended Choir and Choir Aisle were first constructed, a moderately deep layer of soil (C10 and C22) had clearly been deposited across the excavated area before the floor was laid down to raise the level of the interior, presumably to match the existing level of the interior of the rest of the church. The exact original depth of this make-up, comprising imported loam with many stones, including building stone fragments, and hence the contemporary ground level, could not be established, as much had been removed or disturbed during 19th-century alterations to the building. C10 and C22 contained quantities of artefactual material which is presumed to derive from elsewhere in the burgh. The deposits also continued to have artefacts incorporated with them, as coins from the second half of the 15th-century and 16th-century pottery were recovered from C22, a result of the continued reworking of the deposits during later phases of burial.

Within this newly extended church, the soil deposits represented by contexts C10 and C22 formed the matrix for burials of BP4, which included the earliest of those inserted within the church. A



Illus 14 Skeleton 31 showing 'baton' on pelvis

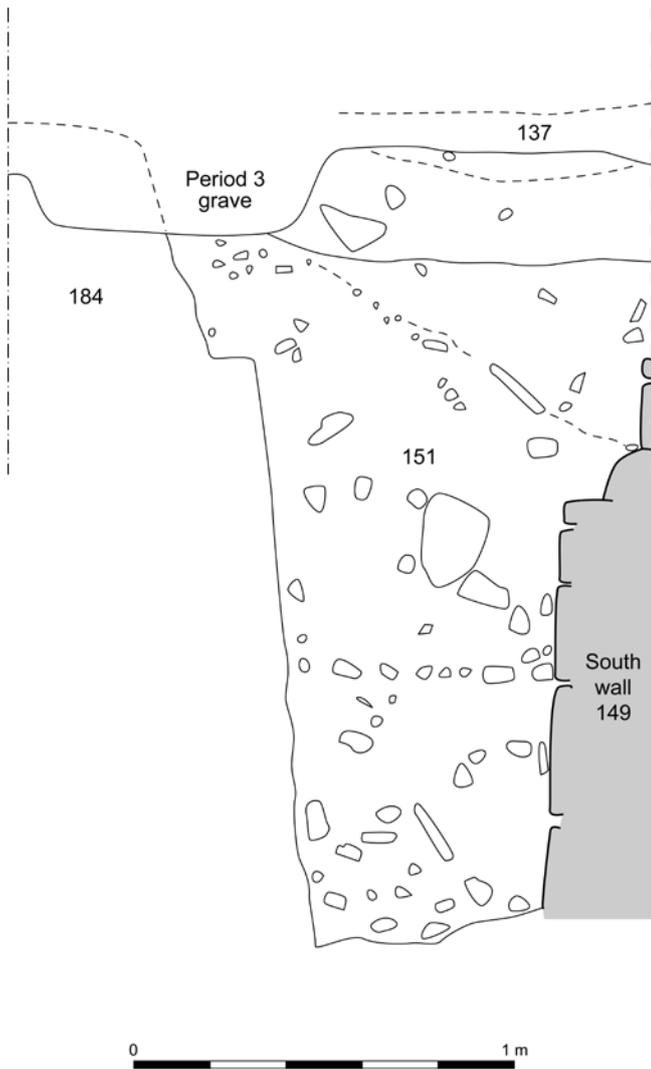


Illus 15 'Baton' in situ on feet of Skeleton 43

later burial phase (BP5, [illus 21](#); [illus 22](#)) could be distinguished from BP4, but only where burials had been inserted into the backfilled material within the robber trench of the earlier east wall constructed in this phase. It seems certain that some of these BP4 burials were contemporary with these BP5

interments and, within reports elsewhere, BP4 is assigned to Period 3 in general.

All the burials inserted after the construction of this part of the church were aligned on the axis of the building, and in most cases they were interred in rows, with clear division and lack of intercut-



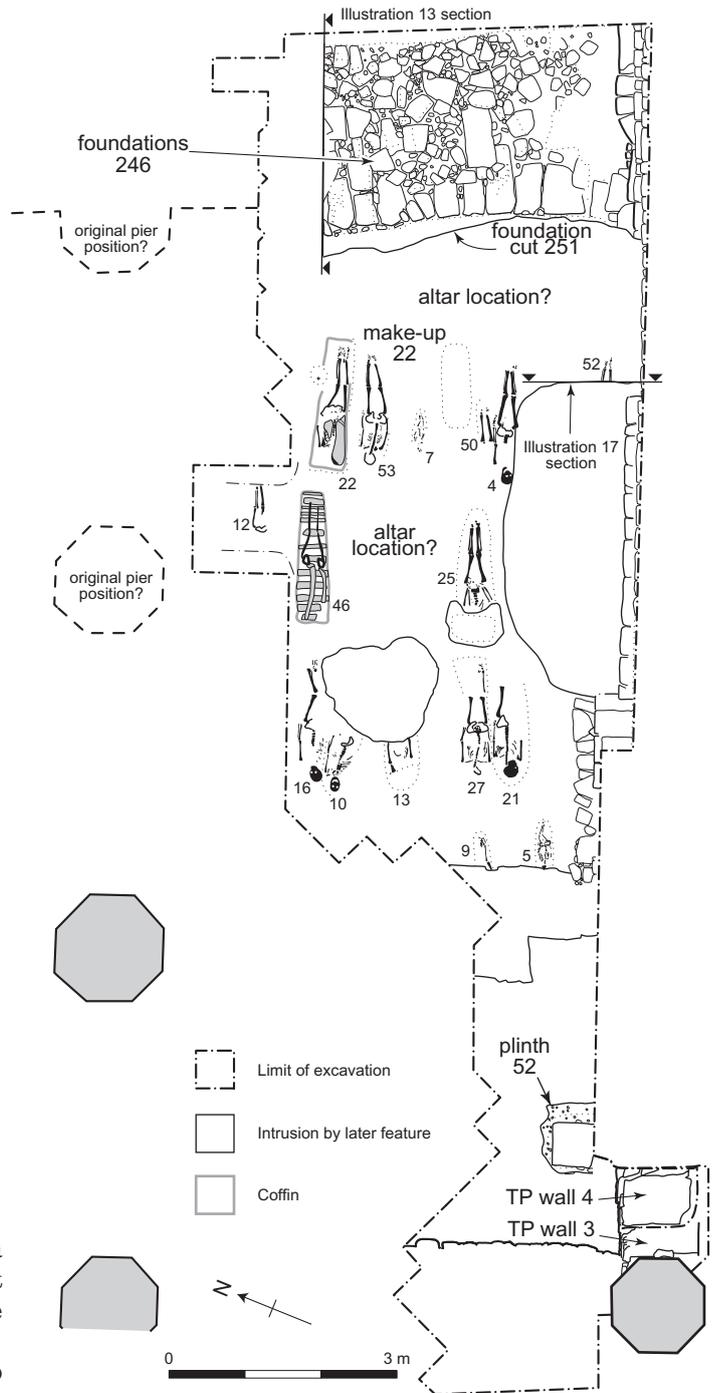
Illus 16 Section through Period 3a construction trench (C151) for south wall (C149)

ting, indicative of the marking of graves. One area centrally placed against the face of original east wall was clear of burials and this may indicate the site of an altar (*illus 17*).

A squarish stone slab (C52), located adjacent to the south wall near the west end of the third bay, is likely to have served as a plinth for a statue or monument. The slab measured *c* 0.55m square and 0.25m deep and rested on a mortared rubble foundation. Its upper surface was 0.64m below the level of the modern church floor, perhaps giving an indication of the level of the contemporary church floor.

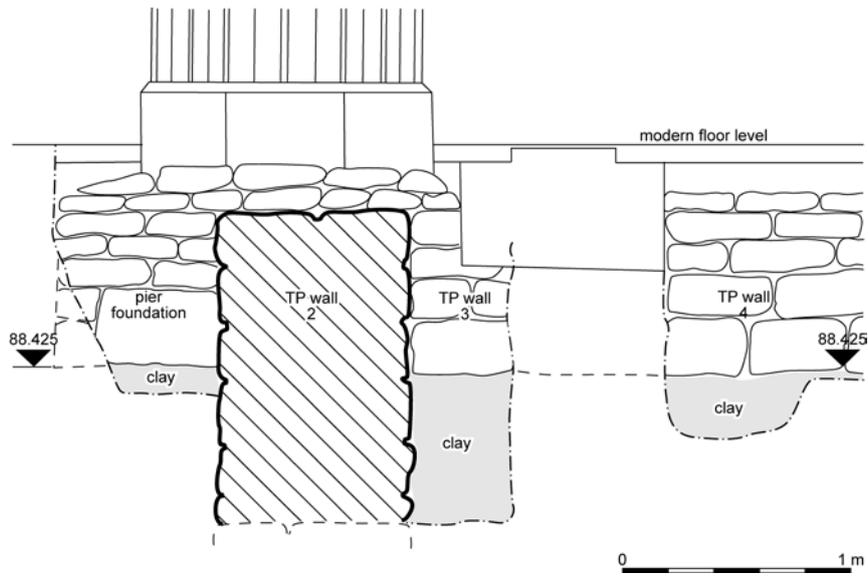
4.1.5 Period 3b: mid-15th century to the Reformation (*illus 17*; *illus 18*; *illus 21*; *illus 22*; *illus 23*)

The original east wall (C246) was demolished and robbed down to the lowest levels of its foundations. In its lower levels, the primary fills of the robber trench comprised mostly loose clays with much

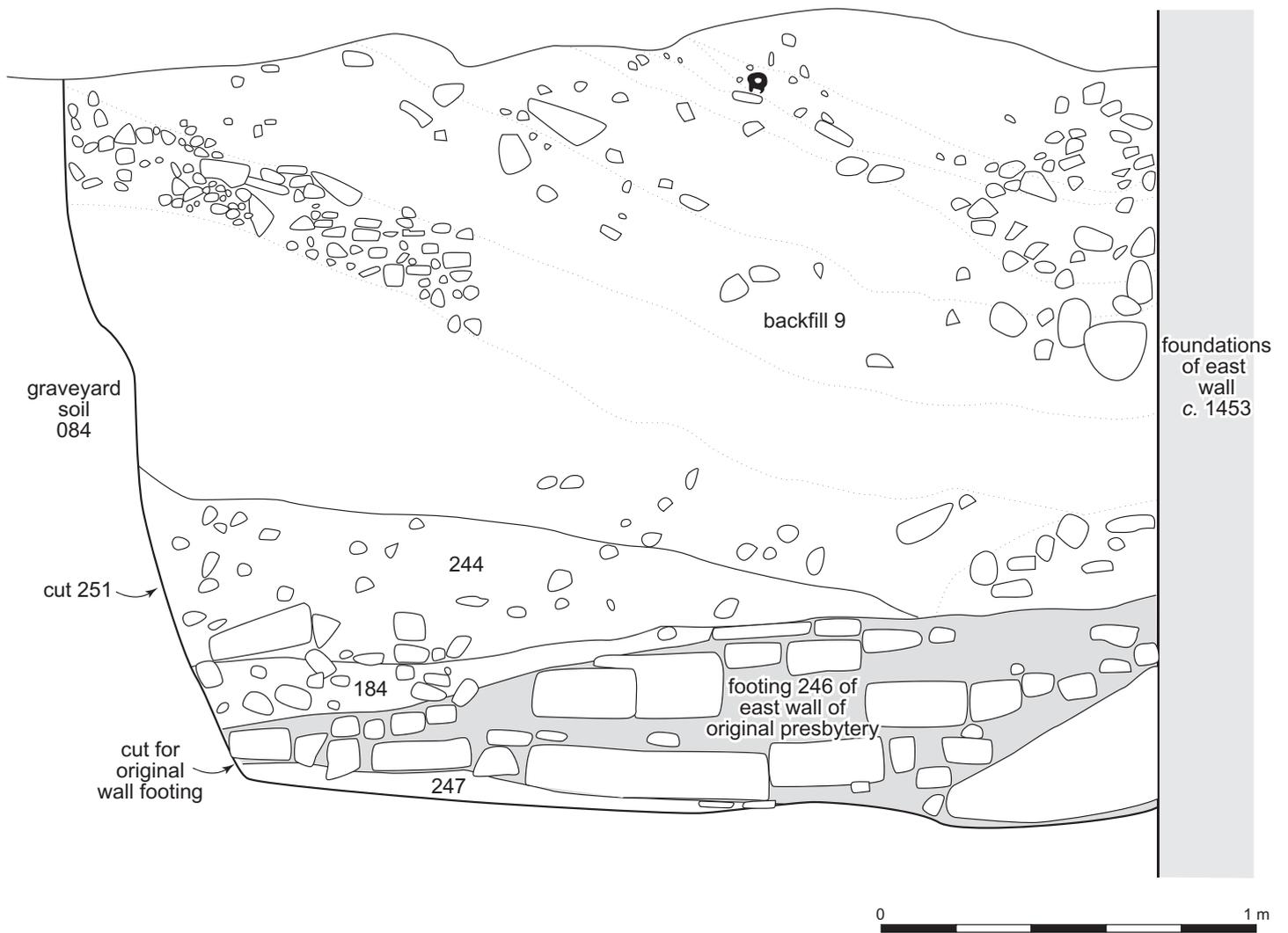


Illus 17 Period 3a, Burial Phase 4

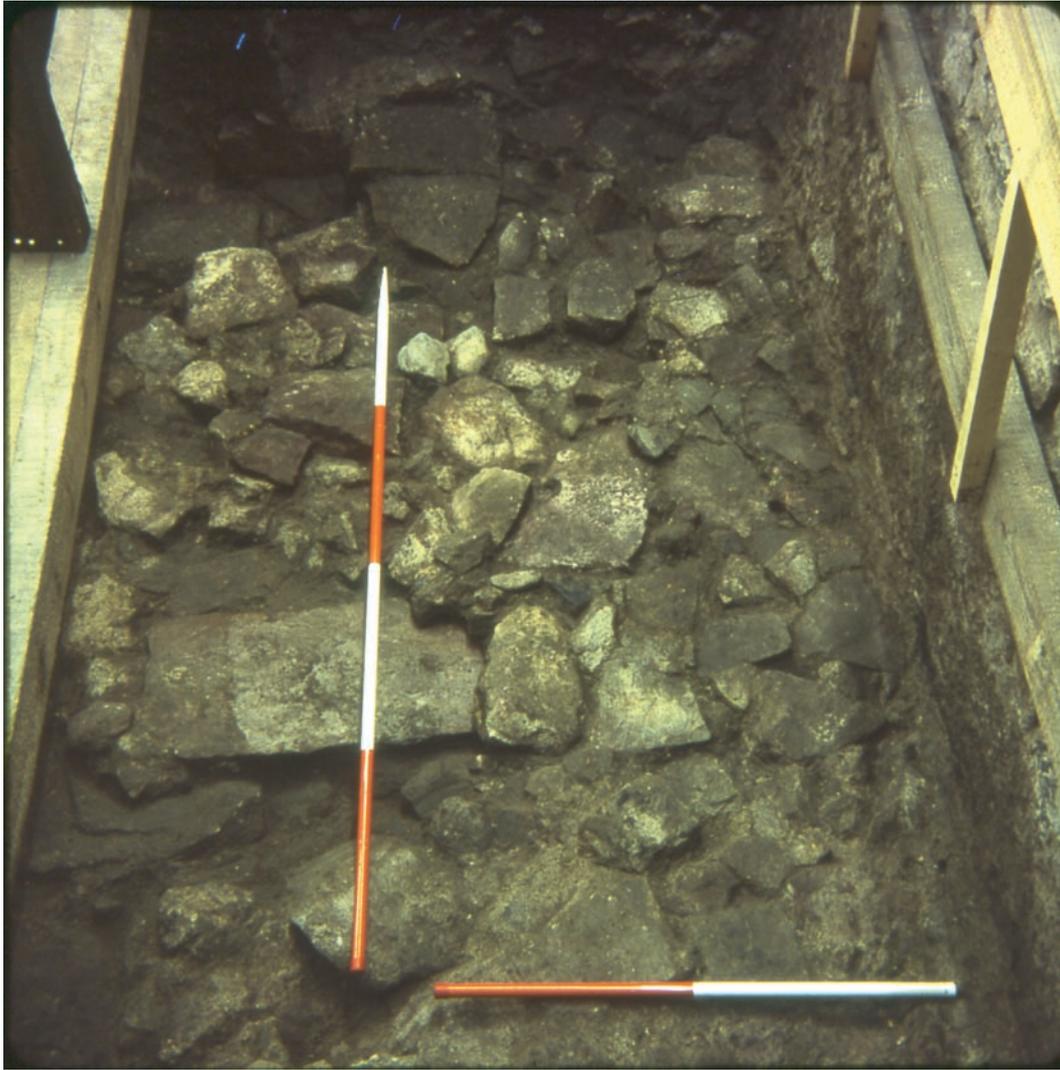
fragmentary ashlar (C184, C244), while the upper fills comprised a mixture of soft fine sand, mortar and soil with clear tip-lines indicating infilling from the west side. Most importantly, a very worn billon penny of James I or II (1424–60) (see [Section 10.3 – Coins and Jetons](#), catalogue no 1) was found in the backfill (C231) of the robber trench. Although it is unfortunate that it has not been possible to date this item more accurately, it does provide a *terminus post quem* of the mid-15th century for this event. This rebuilding was associated with the enlargement of the two eastern bays of the aisle, which



Illus 18 Section of 1977 trial pit TP4



Illus 19 Section across robber trench (C251) of east wall (C246)



Illus 20 Footings of east wall of original presbytery (C246) in base of robber trench (C251)

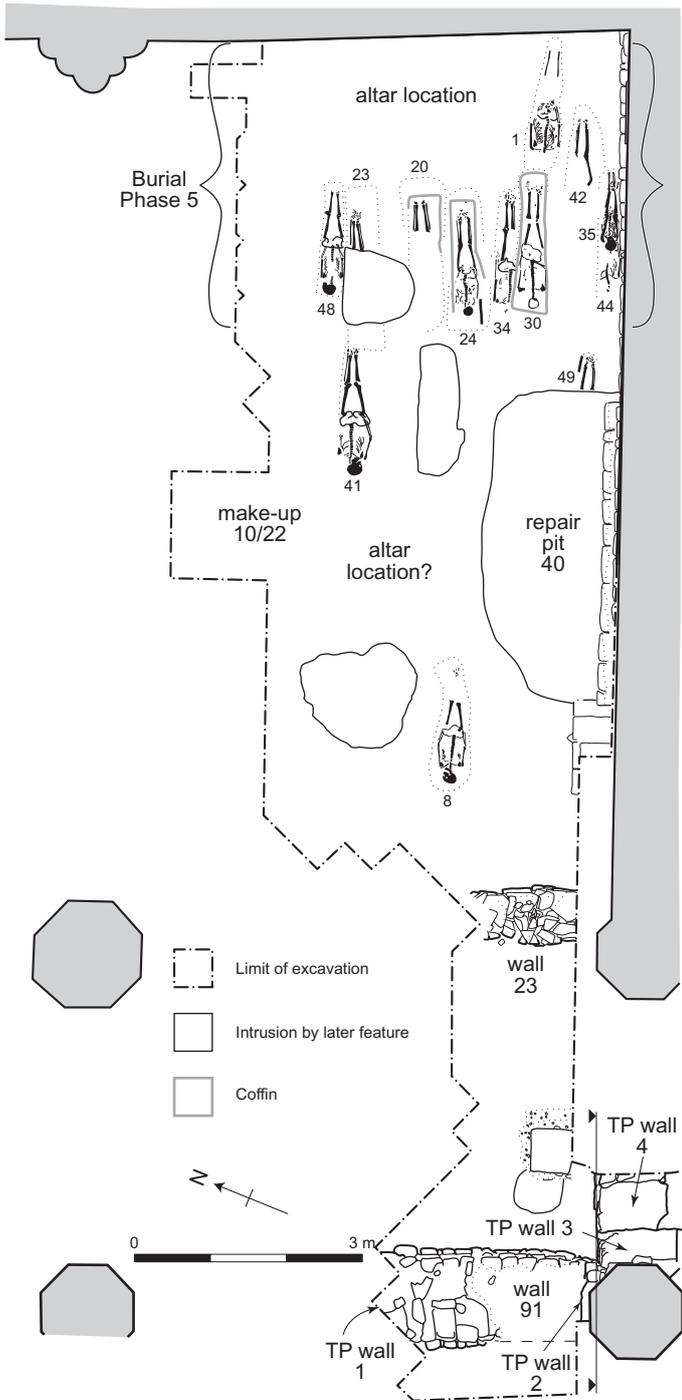
were furnished with columns more elaborate than their predecessors which still stand in the bays further west. A date of *c* 1453 has been derived from the heraldry on the column capitals of the extended Choir and this fits well with the date of the coin.

The east wall was in fact moved only a small distance to the east, where it still forms the eastern wall of the kirk. The west face of the present east wall of the church overlapped and was founded upon the east face of the earlier foundation. A trial pit dug outside the church revealed that the bottom of the eastern part of the foundations of the present wall are set at a level almost 1m below that of the western part, and 0.46m below that of the original wall. (The bottom of the foundations of the first wall was located at 86.45m OD; the top of this foundation below the west face of the existing wall at 86.98m OD; and the bottom of the east face of the foundations of the existing wall at 85.99m OD.)

Cut into the uppermost fill of the robber trench was a discrete group of 14 burials (BP5), arranged as to form an undisturbed rectangular area measuring *c* 2m × 1.5m against the east wall and straddling the

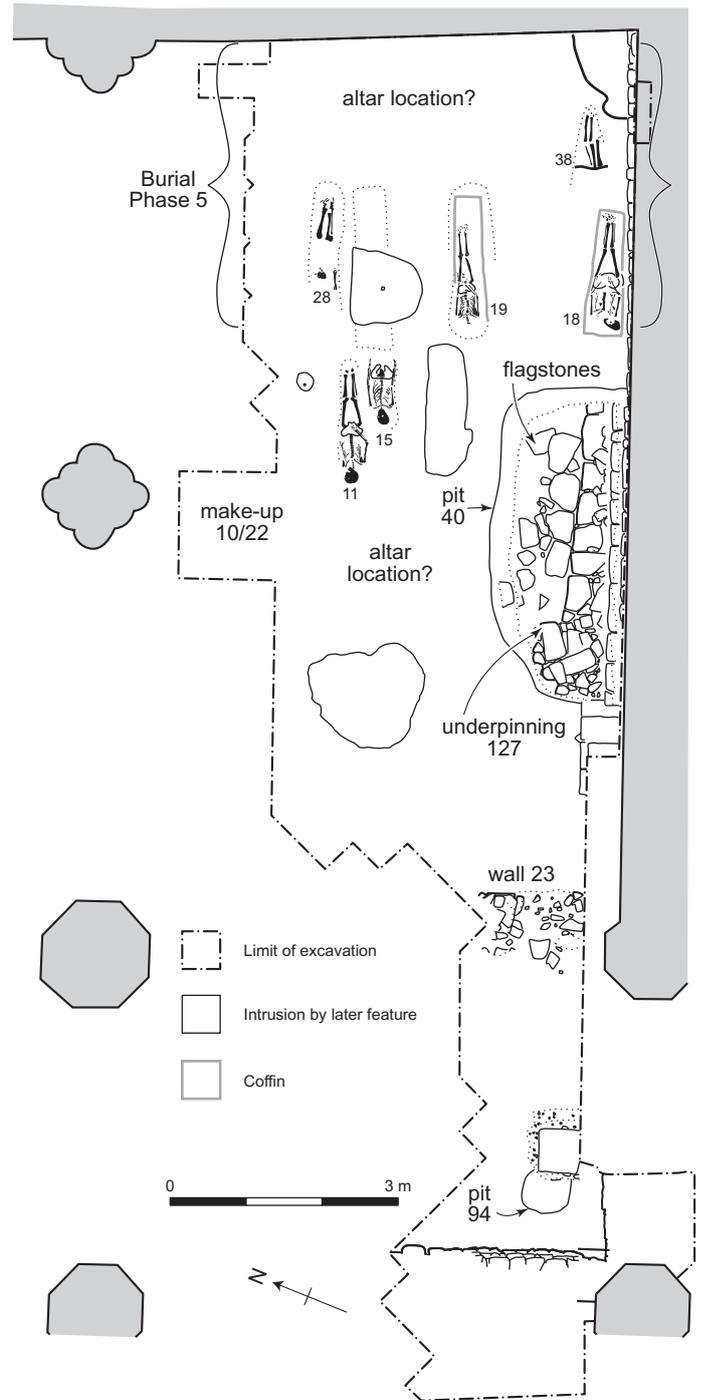
east–west axis of the aisle. This area again presumably marked the position of a pre-Reformation altar against the east wall of the aisle. To the west, within the body of the aisle, a clear space was visible within the arrangement of the burials of BP4 where no interments were made and this may also be interpreted as the possible position of an altar within the Aisle (*illus 17*; *illus 21*).

The construction of the Preston Aisle to the south of the Choir Aisle is conventionally dated to the same period as the remodelling of the eastern end of the church, *c* 1454–55; this would have required demolition of part of the southern wall of the South Choir Aisle. Evidence for this lay beyond the scope of the main excavation but, in a geotechnical trial pit dug in 1977 (*illus 18*; *illus 21*), the stratigraphic relationship between the original southern wall (*illus 21*, TP wall 4) and the foundation (*illus 18*, TP walls 1 and 2) of the northernmost column of the entrance to the Preston Aisle was clear, with the foundation demonstrably later. Other evidence for structural works related to this phase of construction was recorded in the 1981 excavations in the form of two ashlar



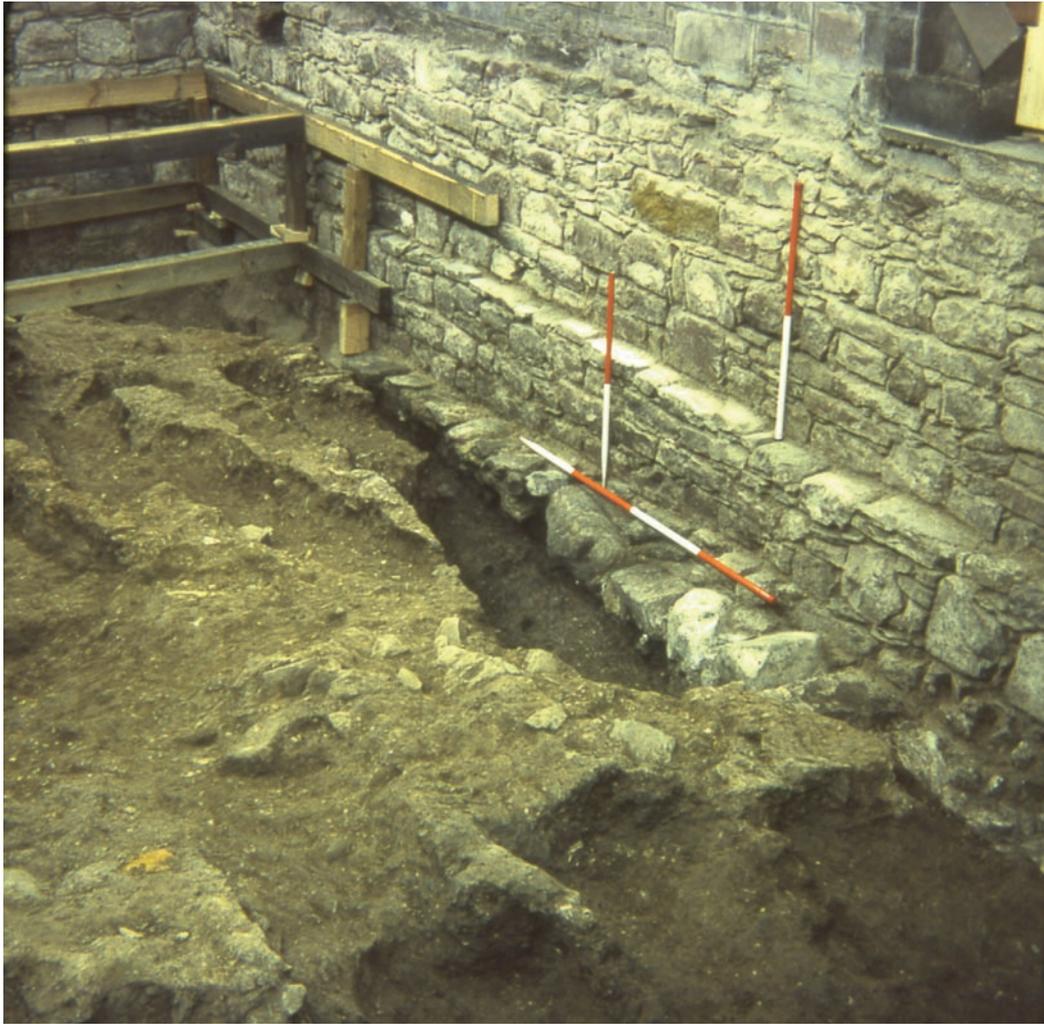
Illus 21 Period 3, Burial Phases 4 and 5

masonry walls (*illus 21*; C91 and C23) supported on mortared rubble foundations, which had been constructed between the pairs of columns of the Choir and the new opening to the Preston Aisle at the junctions of the second and third, and third and fourth bays of the Aisle. These walls clearly did not form part of the original construction of this part of the church, as their construction trenches were found to cut through Period 3 burials which were themselves demonstrably later than the construction of the south wall, and it seems probable that



Illus 22 Period 3, Burial Phase 5

they were built as additional buttressing to the column foundations, below ground level, when the south wall was demolished in this area to allow for the construction of the Preston Aisle to the south. This theory is supported by the fact that no such foundation grid wall was considered necessary at the junction of the fourth and fifth bays, in which area the south wall was not demolished. Both stood to almost the level of the present church floor, suggesting that the floor in this area was at more or less its present level after the date of their construction.



Illus 23 Underpinning of south wall in Period 3b

Subsequently, part of the south wall of the church appeared to have been underpinned at some stage (*illus 23*). A large pit (C40) had been dug adjacent to the wall beside the wall across the junction of the fourth and fifth bays, and within this pit an extra course of masonry had been inserted below the lowest foundation course of the wall, and a buttress of mortared stone (C127/C163) had been built at an angle against the foundations (*illus 22*; *illus 23*). There were also a number of flagstones at the bottom of the pit, which may have served simply as a solid floor for those employed in the underpinning. Evidence for the necessity of this underpinning could be seen in the form of cracks both in the wall above and in the roof of the aisle in this area. No burials had subsequently been inserted into the infill of the pit.

4.1.6 Period 4: Reformation to 1981

There was no evidence that burials were interred in the South Choir Aisle following the Reformation,

and all the dating evidence recovered from the burials of Period 3 confirms this, with no datable material later than the mid-16th century. Most of the highest deposits overlying the Period 3 deposits below the modern church floor level were removed by contractors before the excavations commenced. These late deposits comprised dust and dry soil, with quantities of loose human bones, clearly disturbed when other burials had been inserted. Victorian brick-built heating ducts crossed the area at this level. Where small amounts of these late deposits were left on the site, they were found to contain fragments of plaster from the William Burn refurbishment of 1829–33, removed from the interior of the church during the 1879–83 restoration by Hay and Henderson.

A large area in the north-west corner of the site had been subject to disturbance at a relatively late date, including the digging of a large, shallow, irregular pit (C13; not illustrated). The purpose of this is unknown, but it had the effect of disturbing burials to a level below that affected by 19th-century work.