

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL, MEDWAY, KENT

REPORT OF A MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION ON THE NORTH SIDE OF
THE CATHEDRAL (PROJECT CODE RCD RP 10), NGR TQ 74312 68514



The excavated pit looking south-east toward the East End of the Cathedral.

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For the Dean and Chapter of Rochester

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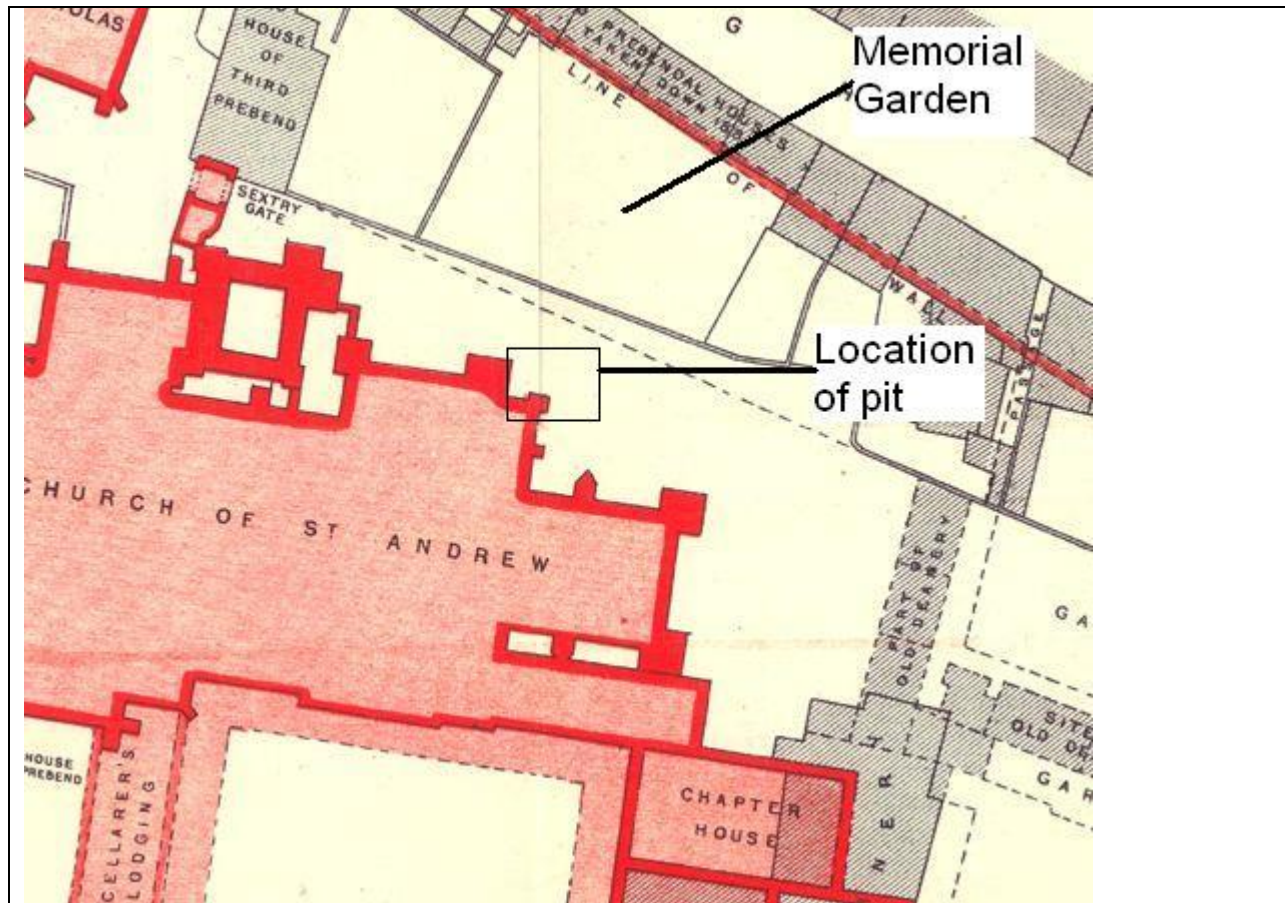


Figure 1: Location plan (not to scale), based on St John Hope's precinct plan of c 1898.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A small excavation on the north side of the Cathedral revealed a remnant of a stone wall running parallel with the existing roadway from the Deanery Gate to the Old Deanery. The date of the wall is uncertain but it appears to be of post-medieval origin at the earliest. It may have been a boundary wall separating the roadway from the area immediately adjacent to the Cathedral itself. A small group of finds was recovered during the excavation, including a few pieces of Roman pottery and tile, post-medieval pottery and tile, and several pieces of bone. Five of these appear to be human, and will be reburied within the Precincts.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Dean and Chapter of Rochester embarked on a major project to provide better and more extensive information about and interpretation of the Cathedral in 2008. The project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and included work both within and outside the building. One element of the external work was to improve the signage and waymarking around the Cathedral. This included the provision of a new sign just inside the northern Precincts, directly opposite the gates to the Memorial Garden. The new sign would be substantial, and therefore needed an equally substantial foundation. This was to be of concrete, with the metal stations for the sign set within it. The location for the new sign is shown on Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 2: Location of the foundation pit seen through the gates from the Memorial Garden, with the Cathedral's east end in the background.

The Precincts have considerable archaeological sensitivity throughout. The area within the Precincts on the north side of the Cathedral and to the east of the Deanery (or Sextry) Gate seems to have lain within the monks' cemetery during the medieval period. Later, it provided access to successive post-medieval Deaneries to the east of the cathedral (the roadway is sometimes known as Deanery Road).¹ The current Old Deanery (now occupied by the cathedral Tea Shop and the King's School) is a late 18th-

¹ Rochester Cathedral is oriented from north-west to south-east. The orientation largely reflects the pre-existing topography of the Roman town. It is a broadly accepted convention, however, to describe church buildings with reference to a 'standard' east-west orientation even when the reality is significantly different from this, as at Rochester. This convention is followed throughout this report.

century extension and rebuild of an earlier house, which itself had replaced the original Deanery. This had started life as the Prior's Lodging in the late medieval period, becoming the first Deanery in 1541 after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. There was no specifically identifiable historic or archaeological interest in the sign's location, but the general background of sensitivity meant that the excavation of the foundation pit needed to be carried out as an archaeological exercise.

The excavation took place on 8 October 2010,² and was carried out by hand. The foundation pit was 0.86m long, 0.3m wide, and up to 0.85m deep. It was located on ground which slopes down from the roadside towards the Cathedral, and so the pit was deeper on its north side (ie away from the building).

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESULTS

The earliest context was a layer of mid-brown silty clay (5) containing pieces of stone, soft-fired hand-made brick and other rubble. All of the finds were from this layer, which was at least 0.55m thick; it continued beyond the base of the pit. The finds include one sherd each of post-medieval pottery and tile, along with a small amount of Roman material. The latter must be residual. Eleven pieces of bone were also found, five of which are probably human. They probably derive from the monks' cemetery, but their presence in this later soil layer shows that the cemetery soil must have been disturbed when features were cut into it during later periods. The following table summarises all the finds from this context.

Material	No	Wt g	Description
Pot	1	5	Fine Roman grey ware.
Pot	1	1	Sandy grey ware, probably Roman but a very small sherd.
Pot	1	22	Post-medieval red ware, base.
Tile	1	9	Probably Roman.
Tile	1	4	Post-medieval.
Iron nail	1		Oval-headed nail, 62mm long.
Iron nail	1		Small flat-headed nail, 45mm long,
Animal bone	6	23	Ulna and possibly fibula fragments.
Human bone	5	46	Ulna, tibia, clavicle and two unidentified fragments.
Mortar	1	157	Fragment of mortar rendering with moulded right-angle, presumably from the junction of two wall planes.

Wall 4 ran at a slightly oblique angle through the south side of the pit. The stonework (3) consisted of re-used ragstone, though they were not ashlar pieces. The wall was 0.36m tall (if it was all above-ground as built) and of unknown width, with the south side lying outside of the pit. The north side was reasonably convincing as an original face, but

² The excavation could not take place any earlier than this because of a major conservation project on the Treasury/Lapidarium roof. The scaffolding for this project covered the whole of excavation area.

some robbing was also evident in an area of loose mortar and rubble (7) above and to the north of the wall. This material was up to 0.2m thick.

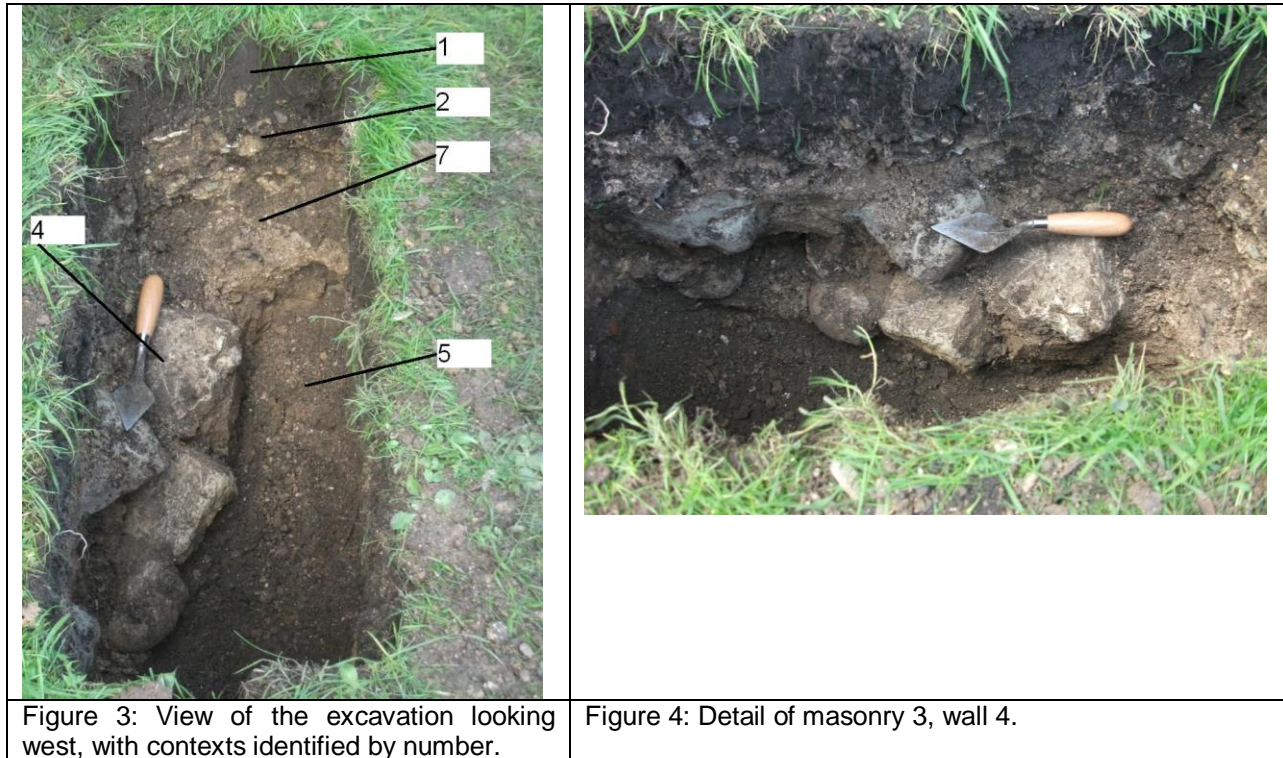


Figure 3: View of the excavation looking west, with contexts identified by number.

Figure 4: Detail of masonry 3, wall 4.

The rubble layer (7) was sealed by a 0.2m-thick mid-dark brown silty clay (2) containing some pieces of stone and tile, possibly derived from layer 7. It was sealed in turn by the 0.1m-thick turf and topsoil (1). The only other recorded context was a yellow plastic pipe (6), probably for gas. This was 100mm in diameter, and lay at a depth of 0.5m below ground (to the top of the pipe). There was no trace of a cut for the pipe, but it was obviously modern and must have been cut through layer 2 at least (and probably through the topsoil as well). The pipe trench excavation would have been backfilled very soon after the pipe had been laid, leaving no differentiation between its backfill and the soil through which it had been dug.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The very limited extent of the excavation makes it difficult to provide a meaningful interpretation of wall 4. It must be of post-medieval date because it had been cut/built into layer 5, which is itself certainly of that era. The wall was not aligned on the axis of the Cathedral but at a slightly oblique angle to it. No obvious structures are shown in this location on 17th and 18th-century surveys of Rochester, but there is a suggestion of a wall on the 1867 1:500 Ordnance Survey city map of Rochester. This could be a roadside kerb, but the depiction seems a little 'solid' for that. Further excavation would be needed to elucidate that nature of wall 4, but for the moment it seems likely that it was a

simple edging feature/boundary between the Deanery Road and the narrow area of open ground on the north side of the Cathedral.

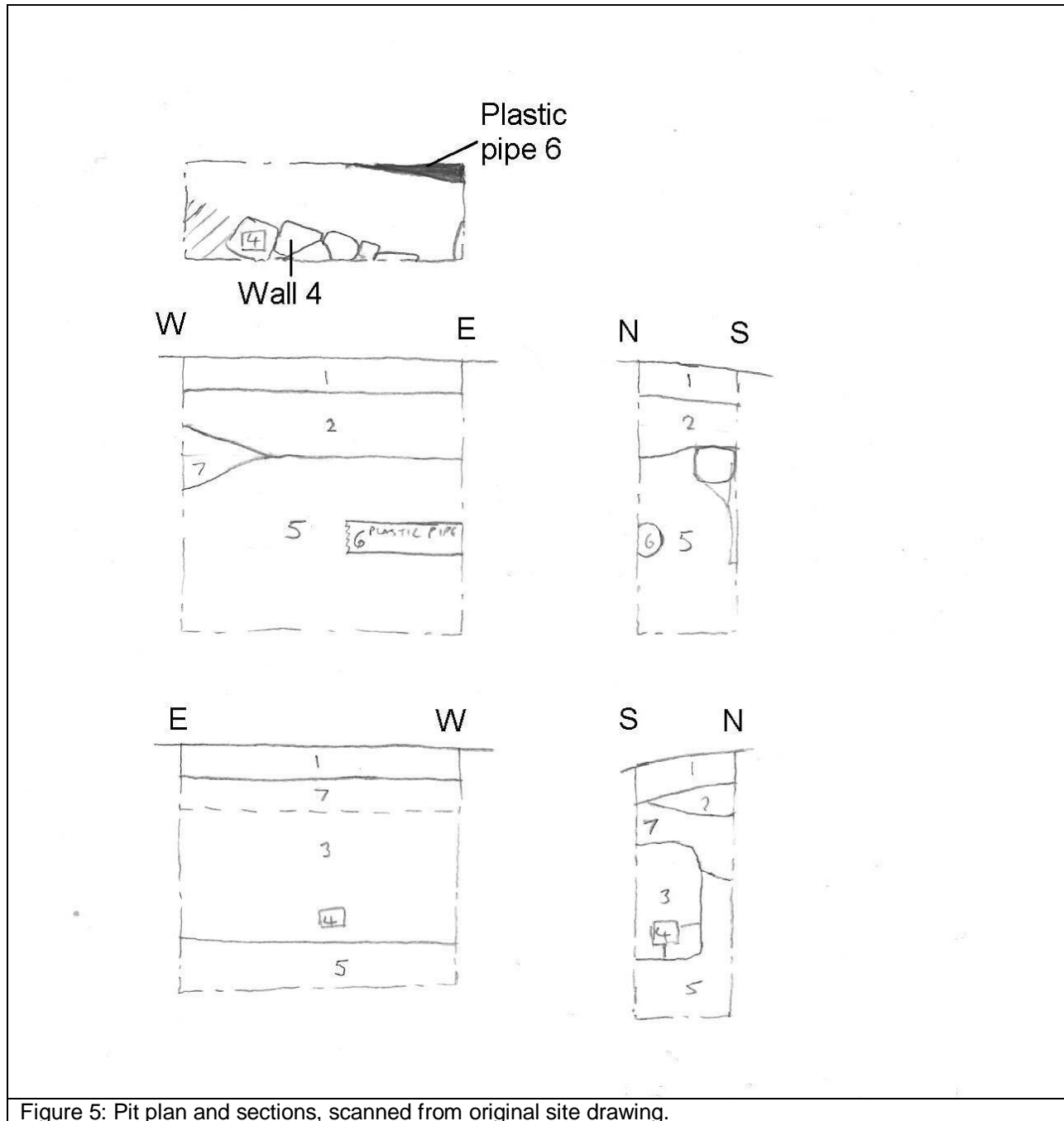


Figure 5: Pit plan and sections, scanned from original site drawing.