



St Andrew, Dalton le Dale
An Archaeological Watching Brief

February/March 2011

coffin plate from the Gregson vault

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Introduction

St Andrew's Church, Dalton le Dale, is largely a building of 12th and 13th century dates, although the evidence of a late 8th/early 9th century cross shaft (built into the south wall) suggests that it stands on a considerably earlier site. The sub-circular plan of the churchyard also suggests early origins. The church was the subject of an Archaeological Assessment in March 1994.

The 2011 works consisted of the refurbishment of the west end of the nave of the church, with re-flooring, the insertion of a gallery with a tea/coffee preparation area and a toilet beneath (resulting in the removal and relocation of two 19th century monuments on the west wall) moving the font a short distance, and the construction of a drain from the north-west corner of the church out through the churchyard to join existing services to the south. In view both of archaeological considerations within the building, and the expected disturbance of burials outside, an archaeological watching brief was requested.

The West End of the Nave

The lower part of the west wall of the nave is of small roughly-coursed stone, and is thought to be of 12th century; the upper part, above a set-back, has a lancet window and is of larger better-square fabric; this is thought to be of 13th century date. Internally the wall was concealed by plaster, and had two substantial mural monuments

- (1) A large central one, capped by a pediment, rising as high as the sill of the west window, bearing an inscription commemoration John Gregson, d.1840, and later members of his family (the last dying in 1913)
- (2) A simpler tablet, to Caroline, second wife of John Gregson, d.1851 (and subsequent family members), set higher up towards the south end of the wall.

Incorporated in the slab flooring, close to the east side of the font was a ledger stone (actually two separate square slabs) which bore the inscription:

RAIN GREGSON E[sq. of] BURDON

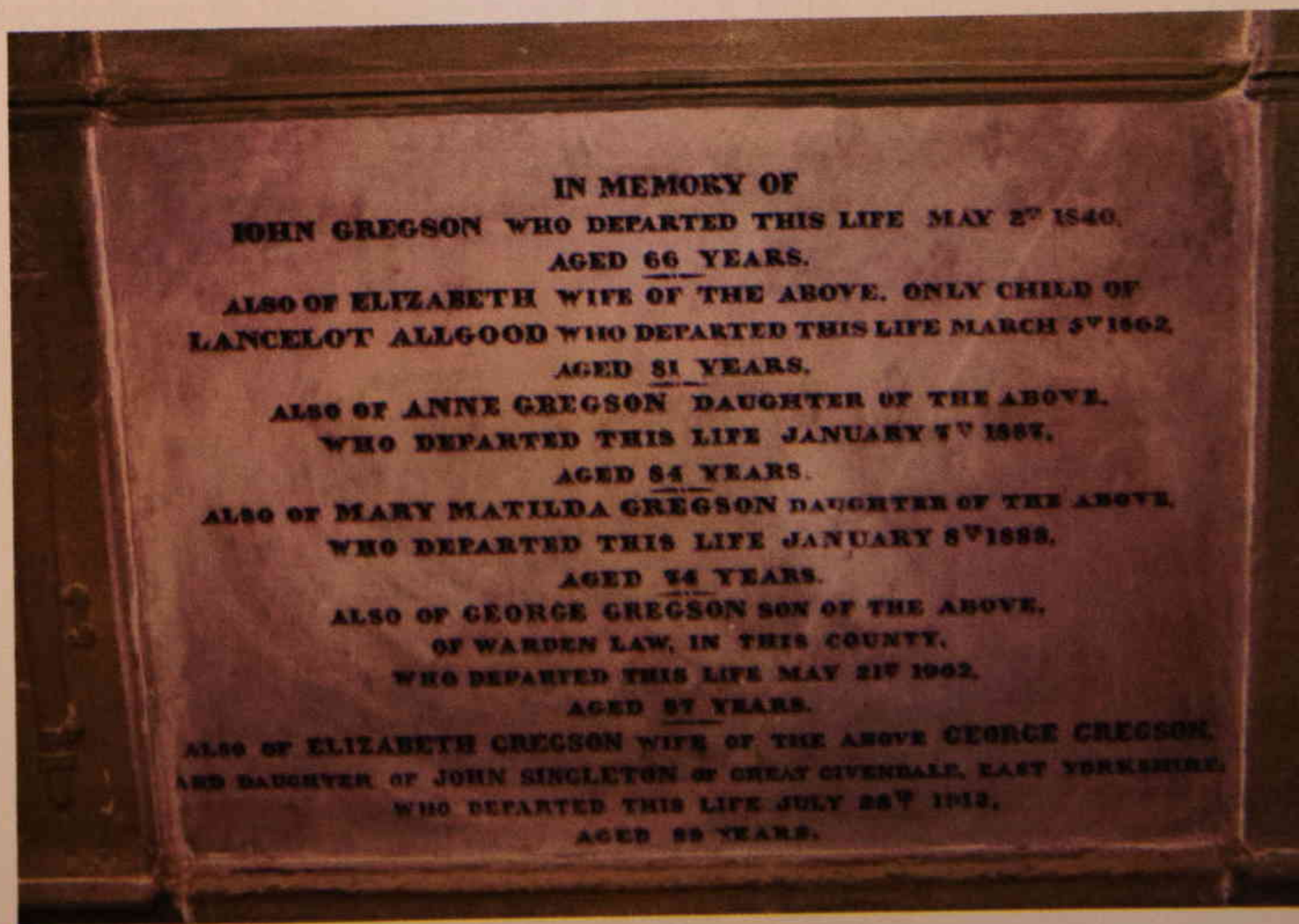
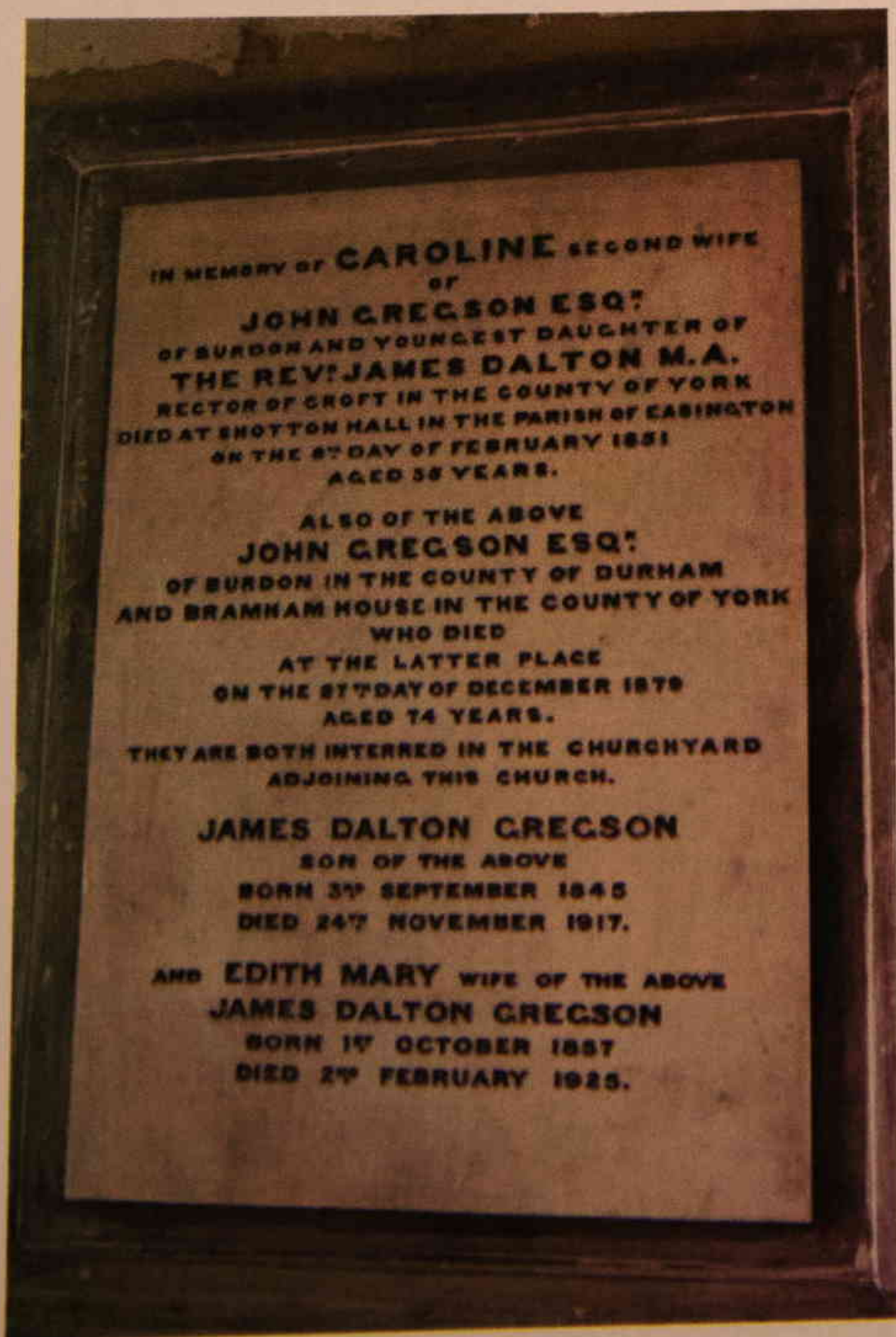
19th Nov7 Aged 66

ANN GREGSON Wife of the said RAIN GREGSON

Died 2 May 1817 Aged 64



*The west end of the nave, before the present works,
and the two mural monuments which have been
re-sited (monument photos: C Downs)*



The missing figure immediately before the 7 in Rain Gregson's date appears to have a rounded lower half, e.g. 6 or 8. Adjacent was another slab with the incised words 'VAULT ENTRANCE'

Both of the wall monuments were removed to accommodate the new gallery, no (1) being re-set at a lower level (without its plain lower panel), beneath the gallery, and no (2) above it. The inscribed slabs in the floor were both re-set in new positions alongside the west wall.

The removal of the wall monuments exposed older wall plaster behind them, and in the case of (1), a crudely-infilled horizontal slot cut into the wall m 2.55 m above the present floor and 0.25 m deep, which would appear to have carried the timbers of a previous gallery¹.

The relatively-recent paving of the floor was removed, exposing a layer of rubble with brick fragments, all of 20th century date; excavations to a depth of 50 cm were made for the piers supporting the new gallery, but these too appeared to be in disturbed ground. Beneath the font was a soakaway, roughly lined with brick, which the contractors stated 'went down about four feet'; this too was clearly fairly recent, as the font had only been moved into that position in the mid-20th century. The only feature of archaeological interest exposed was the top of a brick-arched vault set against the west wall, a little south-of-centre, which clearly related to the adjacent monument.

The Gregson Vault

This was a brick-walled structure, set east-west, internally measuring 2.07 by 1.77 m, and 1.77 m high to the crown of the segmental vault, which consisted of a single skin of brick 110mm thick; the extrados of the vault lay c 100 mm below the floor paving. The removal of a few bricks against the west wall allowed the interior to be photographed and roughly measured. In the vault a single coffin lay against the north wall. The coffin, of traditional six-sided form, is probably of lead, although only the decaying wooden outer was visible. It bore a central shield-shaped plate with the inscription, in gold lettering on a black field:

JOHN GREGSON

DIED MAY 2

1840

AGED

66

¹ The 1994 Assessment does not include any specific reference to a gallery at Dalton, although one might be expected as they were an all-but-universal feature in pre-Victorian parish churches, and commonly removed during later restorations.

within a wreath of leaves, embossed in some bright metal (copper/tin alloy?) which has tarnished to a uniform green; there were also decorative corner plates to the coffin, in the same material, and two further rosette-like plates (which had presumably surrounded the handles) lay on the floor of the vault; one was fished out using a retractable hand tape, and photographed before being returned.



Entry into the vault was at the north end of the east wall, where there was a panel of exposed brickwork (otherwise the walls and vault were plastered over). The 'VAULT ENTRANCE' slab was in the paving above this point.

Composite photograph of the interior of the vault, looking east, showing bricked-up entry

The Trench on the Churchyard

This service trench, initially 0.30 m wide and c 1 m deep, extended from a cut made through the base of the west wall of the church, close to its north end, for c 6 m to the west and then turned south to cross the churchyard,

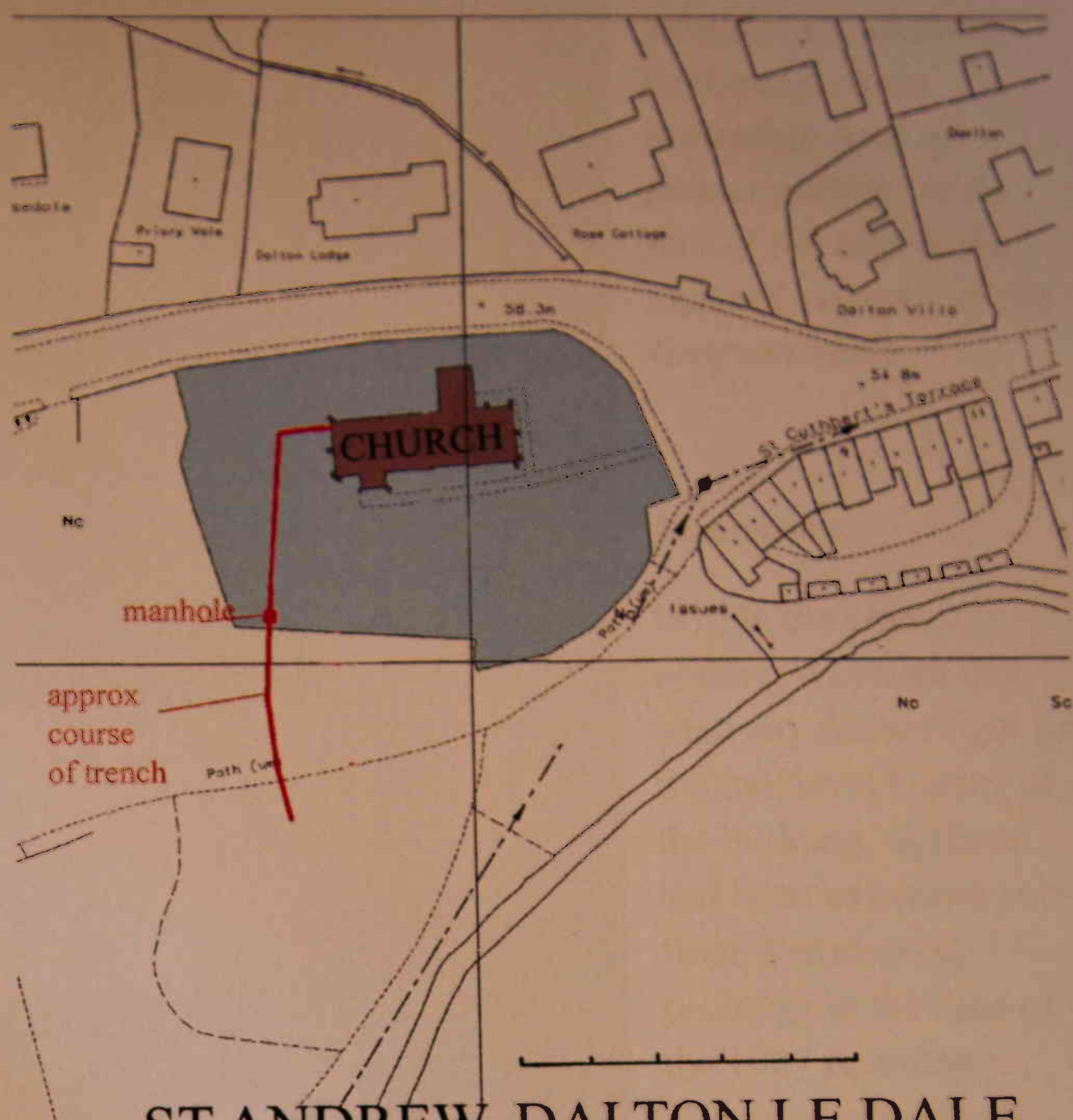
deepening slightly as the ground surface rose towards the bank that forms the southern boundary, just within which a larger excavation (2 m north-south by 1.2 m east-west by c 2 m deep) was made for the installation of a manhole. A month or so later the trench was completed by being extended south for another 30 m or so, outside the churchyard, to link up with existing services.

The initial excavation where the drain came through the base of the nave wall exposed the chamfered plinth, only 0.15 m below the present surface level; to the south this was traced extending around the central pilaster buttress.

The trench crossing the churchyard was cut by hand; rather surprisingly (and to the great relief of all concerned) no human remains were disturbed, other than the inevitable disarticulated fragments. Just outside the line of the south wall of the church an area of loose rubble was encountered, and then, further to the south, the southern edge of a grave cut a little

to the east of (and doubtless associated with) the isolated headstone of John Stockbourne ('Master Mariner, late of Hull, who lost his life in Seaham Harbour 1835'). The trench cut the churchyard boundary bank immediately to the east of the surviving short section of stone wall at the south-west corner, and no significant stratigraphy or structural remains were encountered.

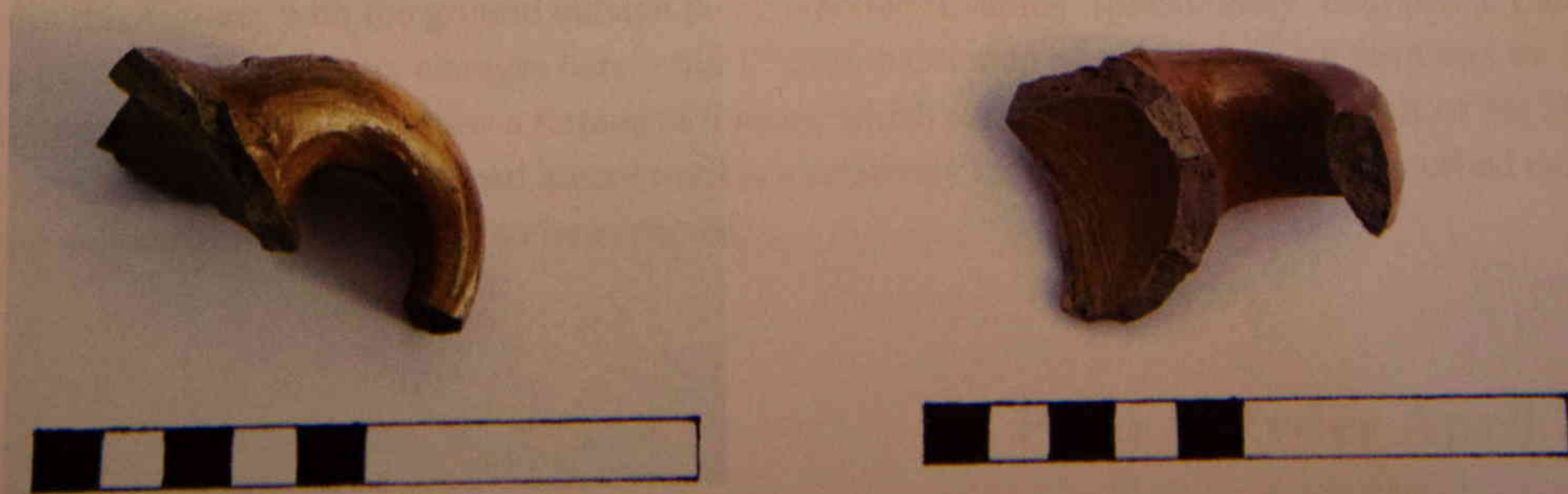
One piece of interesting pottery was retrieved from the contractor's spoil heap alongside the excavation for the manhole. This is a sherd with the handle of a tankard or flagon, in pink/brown fabric, tentatively identified as salt-glazed stoneware, which (if English) is probably of early 18th century date, but could be a century earlier if an import (pers. comm. Richard Carlton).



ST ANDREW, DALTON LE DALE

Churchyard and Drainage Trench
(after architect's plan, annotated PFR)

The land outside the churchyard has been heavily disturbed (see Discussion section). Although the 'cut away' plan of the southern boundary makes it seem highly unlikely that the yard has been truncated, no evidence of human remains was seen, but c 1.5 m outside the present boundary (an iron fence) there was a deposit of sea shells (limpets and razor shells) at a depth of c 0.60m, looking to rest on undisturbed subsoil. South of this the ground was disturbed to the full depth of the trench, with modern brick, coal, rubble and debris.



Flagon handle in salt-glazed stoneware, perhaps early 18th century



The west wall after the removal of the monuments, showing horizontal chase indicating level of former gallery; at the foot of the wall is the exposed extrados of the Gregson vault.

Discussion

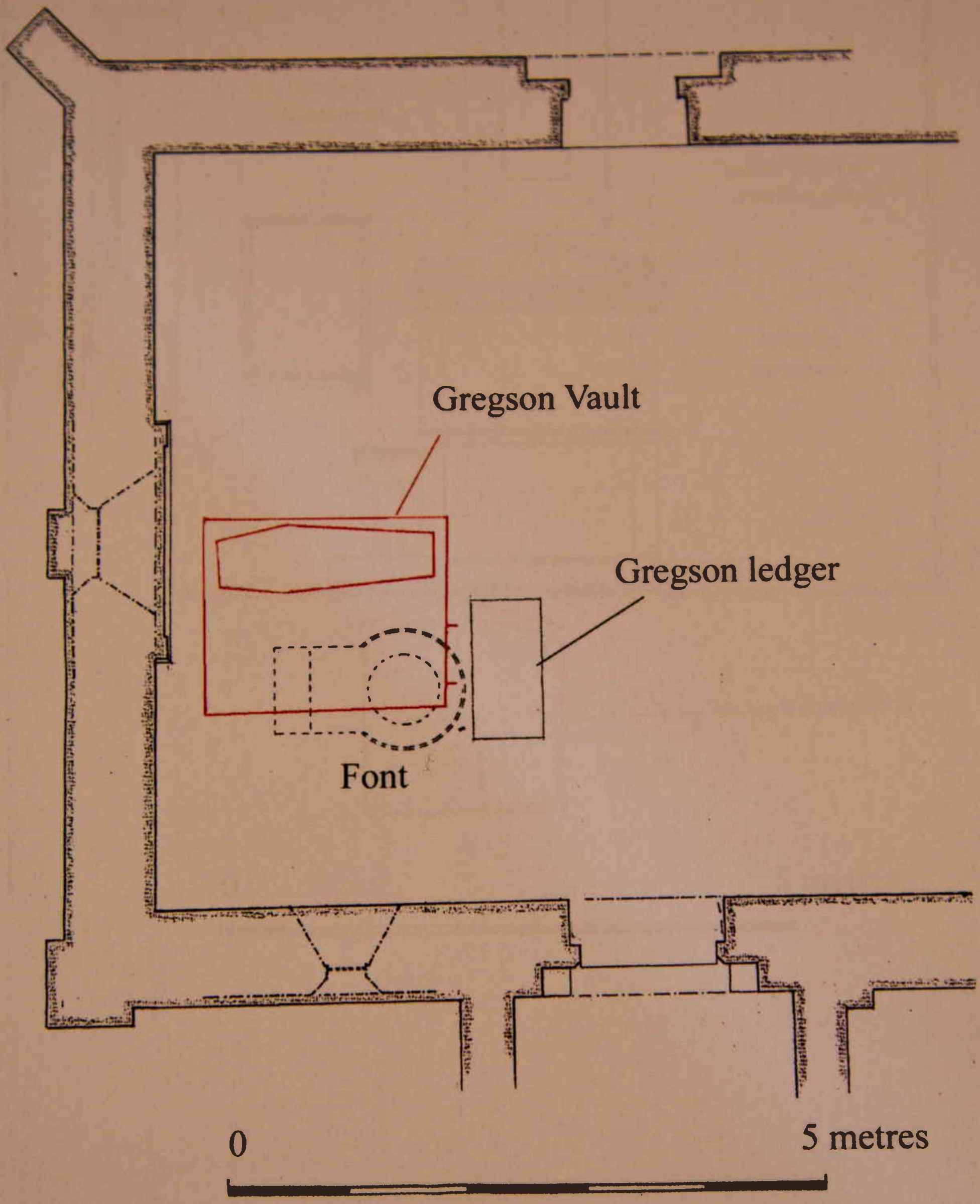
Within the church, nothing was seen that shed any further light on the medieval history of the building, as there had been extensive sub-floor disturbance, probably at the time of the 1907 restoration. The most significant feature uncovered was the Gregson vault, which it would appear was only ever occupied by the one burial.

The trench through the churchyard thankfully avoided disturbing

burials. The plan of the churchyard suggests that a section on the south perimeter has been cut away; a map of c1780 in Pateman's Some Notes on Dalton-le-Dale and its Church (1980) shows this feature, with the ground outside being labelled 'Colpitts' (presumably 'coal pits'). Later map evidence shows many changes here – the 1st edition OS map of c1860 shows a farm and its building, but later editions show a terrace of houses, which survived into the second half of the 20th century, so the present landscaped greensward is a relatively recent creation and the disturbed nature of the sub-surface deposits only to be expected.

Peter F Ryder April 2011

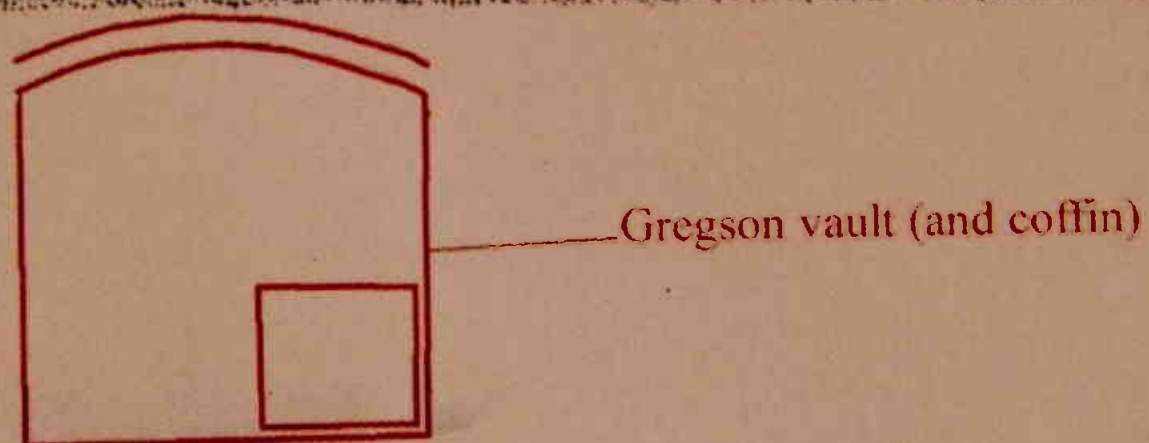
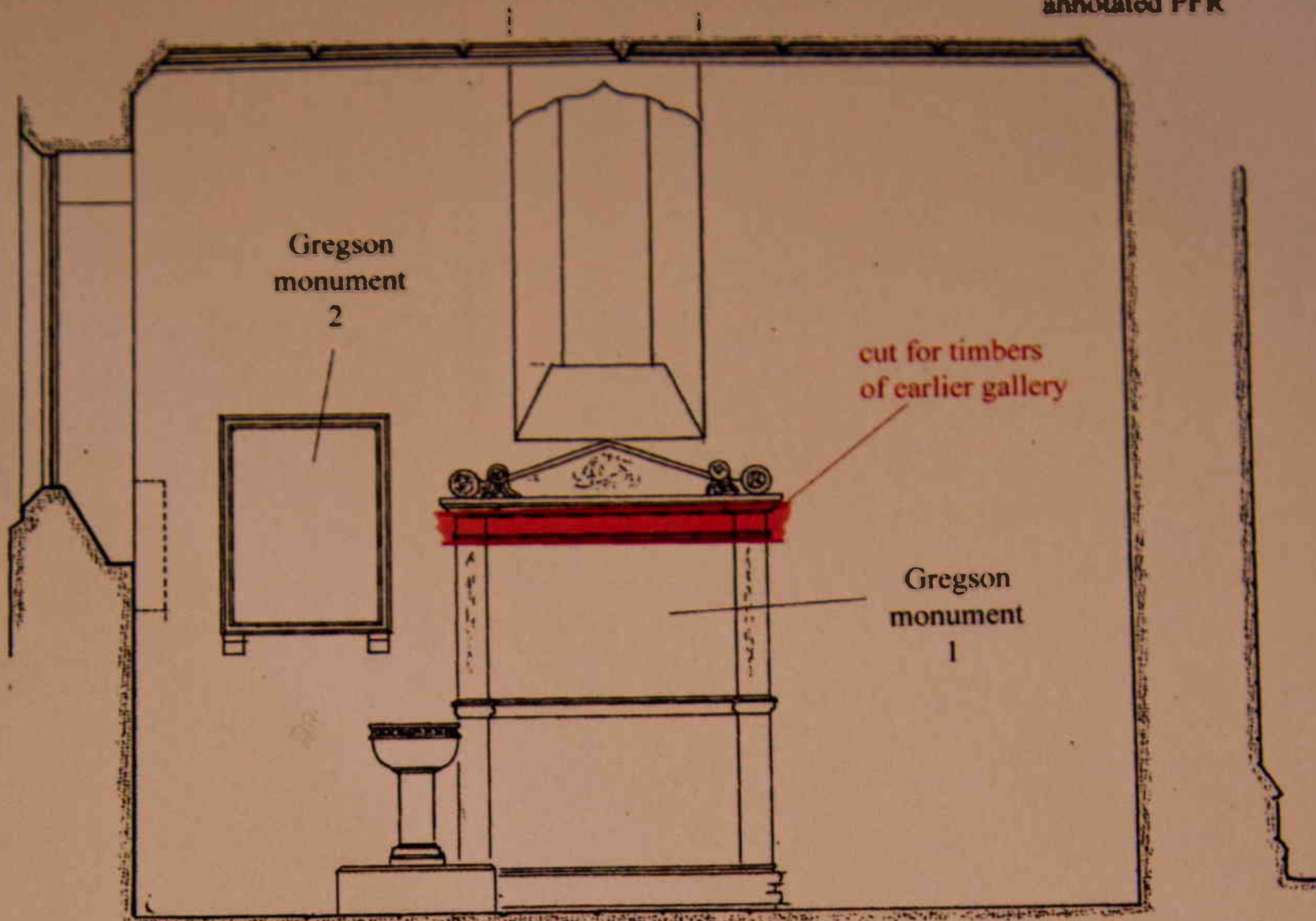
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West End of Nave, after survey by C Downs
annotated PFR April 2011



ST ANDREW, DALTON LE DALE

Internal Elevation of West Wall of nave (after survey by C Downs)

annotated PFR



0 5 metres

