

# Watching Brief and Excavation at The Church of The Holy Fathers of Nicea, formerly known as The Church of St. John.



Oteley Rd, Sutton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

Interim Report by J. Green

January 2018.

**BASKERVILLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES**



# Watching Brief and Excavation at The Church of The Holy Fathers of Nicea, formerly known as The Church of St. John.

For: **The Very Revd. Protopresbyter Stephen Maxfield**  
Shropshire's Historic Environment Manager, **Andrew Wigley**

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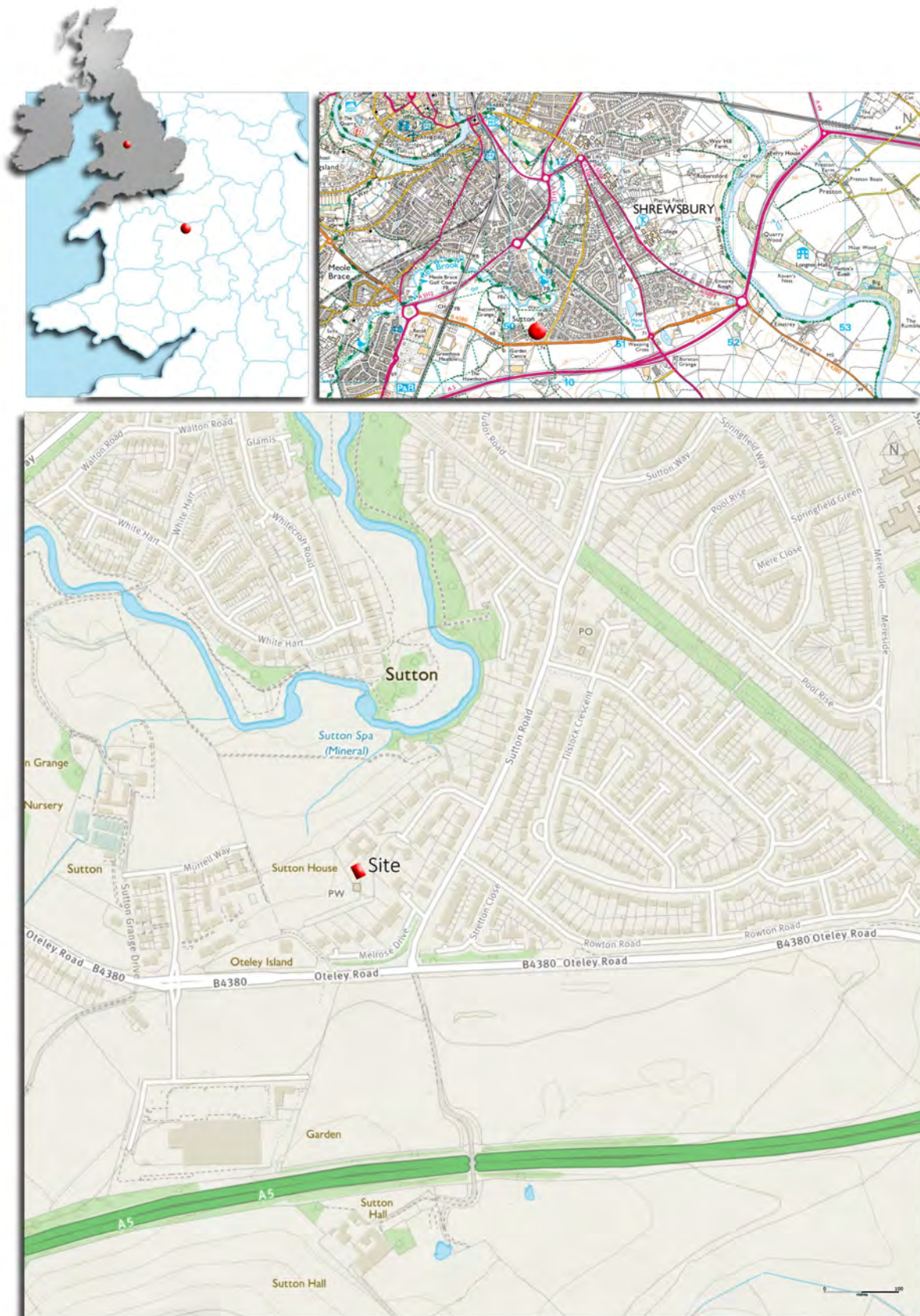


Figure. 1 Site Location



## *Watching Brief and Excavation at The Church of The Holy Fathers of Nicea, formerly known as The Church of St. John.*

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*The Church of the Holy Fathers commissioned Baskerville Archaeological Services to undertake a watching brief and subsequent limited archaeological excavation at the Church of the Holy Fathers of Nicea; formerly known as the Church of St. John, Oteley Rd, Sutton, Shrewsbury. These works took place between October 2016 and February 2017 and included services being installed to facilitate the Church.*

*This is an interim report to satisfy planning conditions for the next stage of development to be undertaken by the Church Parishioners and not a full revelation of everything discovered, due to the Church awaiting funding for complete post excavation work and a proposed phase 2 of extended archaeological works to fully comprehend this important site.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

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Developers Taylor Wimpey have commenced the building of a large housing estate on the land surrounding the Church formerly known as St. John's, in Sutton, Shrewsbury (NGR: 50260 10472) (See Figure 1). As a result of this development various archaeological watching briefs, evaluations and assessments, have taken place from 2014 onwards by several companies and are ongoing as and when necessary.

The work discussed in this report represents a program of archaeological undertakings required to fulfil planning conditions associated with the development at the request of Shropshire's Historic Environment Manager, Andrew Wigley and further exploratory work at the request of, and funded by, the current

Orthodox Church who own the land.

This phase of works began in October 2016 and concluded in February 2017. The watching brief and majority of excavation was conducted by Project Officer Janey Green with assistance in February by site supervisor Will Hewson and site staff David Thompson and Scott Peers.

This report details results of archaeological deposits obtained during monitoring of ground stripping and limited intrusive excavation around the church ahead of the creation of a car park for the congregation, together with the installation of a service trench between the Church and land belonging to Taylor Wimpey. In addition, a test pit was excavated to the East of the Church to search for archaeology connected with findings uncovered during these works.

## **LOCATION AND GEOLOGY**

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The Grade II\* Listed Church formerly known as the Church of St. John is situated on a hill on land adjacent to Oteley Rd, Sutton, on the outskirts of Shrewsbury. The land slopes northwards to the Rea Brook and is now bounded by an ongoing housing development to the west, and northwest.

The church itself sits on a largely flat area located approximately 68m AOD. The development site belongs to the Parish Ward of Sutton and Rea Brook.

A Grade II Listed Farmhouse and gardens lie to the east and northeast. Directly south is the now disused burial ground bounded by a 17th Century brick wall.

The earliest historical reference to the Church is of a Chapel on this site in the 1278 inquisition documents. The development site (SJ 5026 1048) is located c. 200m south from the Rea Brook River, the latter forming the parish boundary between Shrewsbury and Sutton.

The bedrock geology of the area is characterized by the Halesowen Formation and comprises sedimentary rocks – mudstone, siltstone and sandstone – formed approximately 307 to 309 million years ago. The superficial deposits are composed of Glaciofluvial and Devensian Sand and gravels. (<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/> accessed January )

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

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The aims of this phase of works was threefold;

- Firstly, to mitigate any damage caused by developer's groundworks to known - and further possible – archaeological deposits and inhumations. Lifting human remains where present above required ground levels prior to reburial on the same site.
- Secondly, to establish the extent of known and unknown foundations of earlier phases of the Church building, together with their condition and possible date.
- Thirdly to install a new service trench from the outside of the Church to connect to services on land belonging to the developers, monitoring machines and groundworkers in areas of likely archaeological deposits and inhumations. Thus, preventing any damage to the aforementioned.

In addition, to produce a record of all archaeology and inhumations encountered.

## **METHOD**

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The aim of this interim report is to present the findings revealed during the watching brief and excavation, to provide new evidence of a much more complex site than was previously known.

This is prepared for, and at the request of; the Historic Environment Manager of Shropshire Council, Andrew Wigley and The Very Reverend Father Stephen Maxwell of the Church of the Holy Fathers of Nicea.

For ease of recording the site has been divided into four areas;

- Area A - Trench 1: Situated directly West of the current Church
- Area B - Trench 3: Situated directly South of the Church
- Area C - Trench 2: A Service Trench Southwest of the Church
- Area D - A test pit located East of the Church

All work was conducted as set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation and agreed by Dr. Andy Wigley and in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA), Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation and excavation (2014).

Additionally, Historic England's, (formerly English Heritage), Guidance for Best

Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burials in England

(2005). A "Guideline on ethical, archaeological, scientific and legal considerations associated with excavation, study and archiving of human remains and associated artefacts and grave-markers from Christian burial sites in England. Published in collaboration with the Church of England".

A licence for the removal of Human remains was obtained by J. Green from the Ministry Of Justice. Licence number 16-0296.

The Level 2 First Aider on site was J. Green.

All site staff practiced current Health and Safety legislation whilst on site.

### ***Trenches***

Areas A and B were stripped of topsoil by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. Following this all excavation was completed by hand. Area C was excavated by machine and services installed. Area D was dug entirely by hand.

- Trench 1 in area A measured 18m in length and 8m width and extended by a further 8m x 3m to the North. Maximum depth was 0.9m.
- Trench 2 in area C was a service run, 15.7m in length by 0.7m in width and a maximum depth of 0.8m.
- Trench 3 in area B was 5.7m x 3.6m
- Trench 4 in area D was a test pit measuring 1.3m in length by 1m in width and excavated to a depth of 0.58m.

***Staff***

J. Green, W. Hewson, D. Thompson, and S. Peers undertook onsite work. J. Green managed the project.

***Recording***

Recording was completed by all staff using pro-forma hand written context sheets, using a continuous number sequence for each separate area of excavation. High resolution colour digital photography was used across all features and illustrations completed on drafting film at an appropriate scale and related to Ordnance Survey datum.

***Finds***

All finds discovered during the excavation were recovered by hand, bagged, labelled and stored according to area and context.

***Samples***

Samples for Paleo-environmental evidence were taken by hand, bagged, labelled and stored for processing.



## HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Studies regarding the archaeological potential of the area (Edwards, E. 2010) and (Josephs, A. 2012), have revealed the existence of prehistoric activity within and around the development site. A summary of these findings, (which are recorded in the HER and in Emily Edward's thorough Desk based assessment, therefore not fully reproduced in this interim report), include:

### ***Neolithic:***

Sharpstone/Weeping Cross Site B – located to the NE of the church – was excavated in 1965, by Ernie Jenks, revealing Early Neolithic activity in the form of linear features, a ditch and a pit containing Mortlake and Peterborough wares. Many Neolithic pottery fragments were also found in Sharpstone/Weeping Cross Site A in the form of isolated finds. Furthermore, during the excavation of the medieval deserted village of Sutton, a causewayed enclosure, a bank with a palisade and ditch were identified associated to Early Neolithic pottery assemblages.

### ***Bronze Age:***

The excavation at Sharpstone/Weeping Cross Site B also revealed a number of cremations, inhumations and a ring ditch dated to the Bronze Age. At site A, a further two ring ditches were revealed and excavated. Cremations were found within these features. Further evidence dating to the Late Bronze Age was also recovered from this site in the form of pits, postholes and ditches associated to a large circular structure. Bronze Age activity was also documented at Meole Brace during the 1990s excavations. This program of investigations revealed a cremation cemetery and a ring ditch (see Cooper and Leach 1990).

### ***Iron Age and Romano British:***

The Iron Age tribal lands of the Cornovii surround modern-day Shrewsbury, who's capital lay on top of the Wrekin in the form of a hill fort, some 25km from the Church. The existence of Iron Age activity within the vicinities of the development site is evidenced at Meole Brace in which an enclosure site and associated field system have been identified. Furthermore, a ditch enclosure containing the remains of a round building were revealed at Sharpstone/Weeping Cross Site A. Another enclosure is dated to the Iron Age – Romano British and excavations undertaken at Sharpstones E discovered a late Iron Age double ditched enclosure together with Roman field boundaries. Sharpstones A and D have both produced further evidence of Roman occupation, including 39m<sup>2</sup> of Roman cobbled floor. There is, in addition, an Iron age/ Romano British enclosure a mere 250m from the Church to the north east of Sutton Farm.

### ***Saxon and Medieval:***

The Medieval history of Sutton and its relationship with the Church is widely documented and reproduced, so will not be gone into at length again here for the purposes of this interim report, only summarized.

The Manor of Sutton is recorded in the Domesday Book as having been gifted to the Much Wenlock Abbey of St. Milburgha's, during the 7th Century. Additionally, the Church of St John is referred to within the inquisition documents of 1278. It is believed that a Church of Saxon origin is possibly situated underneath the current Medieval building.

The adjacent building, Sutton House Farmhouse, (HER 01596), is widely considered to have been the site of a Medieval hall. No visible remains of this building are known.

In the 1960's Jenks identified eight ovens (or kilns) thought to date to the Saxon or medieval period directly south east of the Church, during excavations at Weeping Cross D of the deserted medieval village of 'Sudtone'. A Mill Race and leat was discovered of late Saxon or medieval date. It is widely believed that the Mill, together with two more situated along the banks

of the Rea Brook formed part of the Saxon estate noted in the Domesday book as providing a substantial income to the Abbey.

Earthworks of unknown date have been observed in the former 'North Chapel Yard' of the Church, (HER00087), and a large pond marked as disused on an OS map of 1884, now backfilled.

Post Medieval: Numerous and not pertinent to this interim report. All entries are available on Shropshire HER.

Previous archaeological excavations around the Church and adjacent fields prior to development groundworks, have revealed archaeological deposits of Prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and Medieval remains and the deserted medieval village of Sutton lies adjacent to the Church.

More recently archaeological work has uncovered medieval deposits including a double burial of 2 dogs. (Smith. C, 2016)

The author of this report J. Green conducted a watching brief during top soil stripping in 2016 whilst working for different company. Foundations for the church, inhumations and animal burials were noted and recorded. The report for these works is not accessible at the time of writing this interim report, so the findings cannot be included at this time.

Results

## **AREA A—TRENCH 1**

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### ***Introduction***

Trench 1 located in area A, was positioned 1m in front to the Western end of the current Church and extended in a Westerly direction for 18m. (This metre was left undisturbed to accommodate a recently laid path to the Church for access purposes). The trench was approximately 8m in width North to South, allowing for and working around the temporary path. Towards the end of the excavation this area was extended to the

North by a further 3m and 8m East to West, to uncover further archaeological deposits extending beyond the limits of the current excavation.

Previous recent work had established foundations from an earlier phase of the Church were present at this location. The purpose was to investigate these deposits more fully. Work took place in this area intermittently between October 2016 and February 2017.

### ***Watching Brief***

The topsoil had already been removed over a large part of Trench one by the previously mentioned recent phase of work. Where this remained, it was carefully removed by a mechanical digger under close archaeological supervision. From there on the area was excavated entirely by hand. Depth of topsoil varied from 0.08m to 0.15m where present. Subsoils were thin, averaging 0.05m before archaeological deposits were encountered.

### ***Excavation***

Archaeology was present across the whole of Trench 1, much of which was directly beneath the subsoil and within a layer of sandy silt, as shallow as 0.05m. These features were cleaned by hand and recorded. Slots were inserted in two areas to ascertain the nature of uncertain archaeology. Additionally, two sondage's were created to investigate internal cuts and understand the nature and depth of the foundations.

Weather conditions were mainly fine throughout the excavation, although several severe frosts over the winter period delayed work due to the ground being too solid to excavate without damaging archaeological features present.

### ***Results***

Foundations of earlier phases of the Church were revealed to extend from the current West wall and entrance and continued Westwards for 18m. These com-

prised a combination of red sandstone and green grey Grinshill sandstone.

Both types of stone can be seen in the current Church building standing today. The area has been levelled over the years and much of the stone removed. It was in addition, covered with rubble from demolition or collapse of the once higher walls. These foundations appear to consist of 3 'rooms' or bays and will be described in detail individually below. In addition, an area of prehistoric activity was discovered towards the Western end of the trench.

### **Bay 1 (1032)**

This comprised an area of archaeological foundation deposits (1003) (1039), directly in front of the current Church doorway on the West wall. These corresponded with the existing footprint and run East West from both the North and South walls, to a return wall (1012), aligned North South 4m from the Church. This wall is 1.2m in width with varying levels of collapse (1013) above and adjacent to it (1019). Previous Geophysical results had identified an anomaly in this vicinity, (Stratascan, 2010), although it appeared from the imaging results to be continuing in a Southerly direction, it is likely that what was identified was part of this wall, and an electric cable subsequently discovered on precisely this alignment and position, during this excavation.

The stones are predominantly of red sandstone, with the occasional Grinshill stone. A number of the stones in this return wall are 'dressed' (1036) having tool marks visible to the face. The foundation stones form a clear edge to the Eastern side, the Western edge obscured with rubble, indicating that it likely collapsed Westerly. This would be a logical conclusion to draw as the ground slopes naturally in this direction. Within this first bay there lies a cobbled surface (1020), which is heavily disturbed by modern activity but remains in patches. This was likely a simple floor to serve an earlier entranceway. Also identified were 3 postholes cut into this floor area. One of which was excavated [1030] and interpreted as modern, likely connected to a previous metal railing fence in front of the Church.

Within the collapsed rubble of the South wall (1004) two coins were found, one of which has been dated to 1624-1635 and may indicate the collapse of this portion of the West end to somewhere around this date.

Two modern services cut through this first bay area. One aligned adjacent to the return wall [1008] and the other crossing the trench diagonally northwest/southeast [1052]. Both extend beyond the limits of the excavation and responsible for a break in continuity of the wall foundations.

A sandy silt accumulation deposit (1007) was present between all the stones in trench 1 and varied in depth across site from just a few centimetres to a maximum depth of 0.58m.

Occasional fragments of bonding material and plaster were scattered across the rubble together with a large number of un-stratified Medieval pottery fragments.

Various corroded ferrous objects were also present, ranging from modern barbed wire and railings to building nails that appear medieval and were part of the earlier structure. These were also un-stratified.

### **Bay 2 (1033)**

The South foundation wall continued in a Westerly direction (1039), although ephemeral in places where stone had been removed at some earlier point in time. Deeper excavation at this point revealed a likely 'robber trench' [1014]. The stone wall remained at a deeper level (1027). A return wall (1021) (1038) again aligned North South divided the walls in to a second room/bay of approximately 3.6m. Exact dimensions were not ascertained due to the high level of collapsed rubble and obscuring clear edges and time constrained excavation. However, this area was covered with a sandy silt/ puddled clay (1037), within which were numerous large fragments of glazed medieval tile <1008>, suggesting a floor surface which had subsequently been removed. This floor area was approximately 7m north to south and was uncovered for approximately 4m east to west, to the limits of excavation. This area was cut by a modern land drain [1017] aligned north east/south west.



Amongst the rubble collapse between bays 2 and 3, a curved worked stone was recovered. This has mortar adhered to the outer edge and worn carvings to the face and represents part of an archway. This is a lighter colour than any of the stone in the current Church and is likely to be from a much earlier phase. This find could potentially date to Saxon/early Medieval.

### **Bay 3 (1034)**

This area at the western most point of the area of excavation was sealed by a layer of grey silty clay (1044), varying in depth from a few centimetres up to 10cm. The south foundation wall (1039) continues into this area and possibly beyond the limits of the excavation. However, this entire bay is likely part of an earlier phase of construction. The stonework is very different in nature and character to those of bays 1 and 2, comprising a mixture of red sandstone and large smooth grey cobbles (1041), crudely deposited with no evidence of bonding material.

A posthole [1023] containing two Oak split timbers (1025) (1035) was excavated in the north corner of the trench. Radio carbon dates show these to be late Neolithic/early bronze age – 2033 BC. A deposit measuring 1m by 2m provided evidence of burning extending to the northern edge of the trench at this point (1029). This deposit was not fully excavated due to time constraints but approximately 0.50m in depth. It is possible it could be a hearth or an incident of accidental fire damage to an earlier thatched roof. Given the date of the adjacent wooden posts it is also extremely likely that this area could be connected to prehistoric activity.

There appears to be a third return wall (1053) running north south, but again due to time constraints, this could only be partially cleaned and examined. A cobbled surface lies directly west of this return wall (1041), suggesting a floor surface. It is unclear at this stage if this formed an internal or external feature. A large in-situ foundation stone (1042) and others around it suggest that there are further walling extending beyond trench limits and continuing westwards. Further excavation is necessary before firm conclusions can be

drawn about this entire third bay and the exact nature of its relationship to bays 1 and 2.

### Trench 1 Exploratory Extension

On the penultimate day of excavation Trench 1 was extended by mechanical digger to the north and east. A bulk was left to retain access to and from the Church, therefore this extension was placed 1.8m north of the current excavation and extended for 3m at the west end and continued east for a further 8m.

Within the extension, acknowledging the limited time allowed, it was possible to ascertain that the silty clay deposit (1044), sealing the prehistoric activity, continued into this area for at least 2.5m by 1.2m and likely further.

The cobbling (1041) (1045) also continued into this extension area for 2.5m by 2.8m at the most westerly point and again appeared to form a laid floor surface. In addition, further sandstone foundation deposits are present (1043), beyond the northern footprint of the Church. These formed an area of 3m by 4m, north and east respectively, with a distinct right angle within the stonework. It can only be postulated at this time as to the structure they comprised. A north isle is a possible theory due to the now known much larger earlier Church.

### **Small Finds**

Small finds from secure deposits are listed below and categorised according to material. All small finds will be subject to further expert analysis when funding has been raised by the Church and will form part of phase two of the excavation.

### **Coins**

*2 copper Farthings <1001> is currently undated. <1002> is a 'Richmond' Farthing and dates from between 1625 to 1635 during the reign of Charles I. from context (1004).*



### **Fe – Iron**

*4 pieces of Iron from context (1044)*

*1 Iron fastener <1006> from (1004)*

*1 Fibula type fastener <1003> again from (1044)*

*1 flat fastener <1005> (1004)*

### **Stone**

*1 small circular incised stone <1004> (1007)*

*large carved stone with mortar comprising part of an Arch, Saxon/Medieval <1007> (1044)*

### **Wood**

*2 split Oak posts <1009> <1010> (10240 (1026) Radio Carbon dated to 2033 BC*

### **Pottery**

These comprised largely unstratified pottery sherds of medieval origin. A sample of these are going to be analysed when funding has been secured. Pottery from secure deposits are listed below and will also be analysed.

*7 fragments of floor tile <1008> from (1016)*

*1 rim sherd <1013> (1044)*

*6 assorted sherds (1038)*

*1 sherd <1012> (1029)*

*1 sherd <1011> (1034)*

### **Unstratified Finds and Pottery**

*3 large pieces of Iron*

*4 small pieces of Iron*

*3 large pieces of Mortar/Plaster*

*50+ pieces of assorted Pottery sherds*

*3 pieces of Oyster shell*

*4 glass fragments*

### **SUMMARY**

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The archaeology revealed, comprised predominantly of foundations and rubble from an earlier phase/phases of the current Church. These foundations directly correspond to the north and south walls that are standing today. Excavation clearly revealed that the Church originally extended for a further eighteen metres in a westerly direction, and between at least 8-12m width north/south, in addition to the 10m long building we can see today. Whether this large building was operating contemporaneously with the current Chapel – or whether it was a pre-dating standalone structure - that has been rebuilt and adapted cannot be determined without further, and deeper excavation. The earliest deposits were dated to late Neolithic, early Bronze age and would appear to have a direct connection to Ernie Jenks findings of the same period his 1960's excavation (Sharpstones Weeping Cross – site D). Further research is ongoing at the time of releasing this interim report.

In addition, on the land behind the brick wall to the South of the Church, there are numerous piles of very large worked pieces of stone, representing parts of doorways and plinths. It is likely these are from the collapsed rubble of the earlier phases.



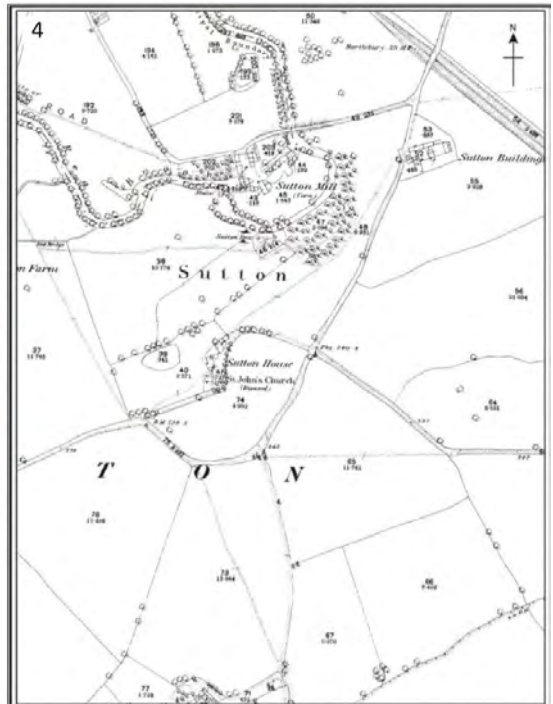


Figure 2 18<sup>th</sup> Century Watercolour by John Holmes Smith  
Figure 3 1832 Hitchcock map  
Figure 4 1932 OS map







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 Baskerville Archaeological Services Ltd  
 May 2017

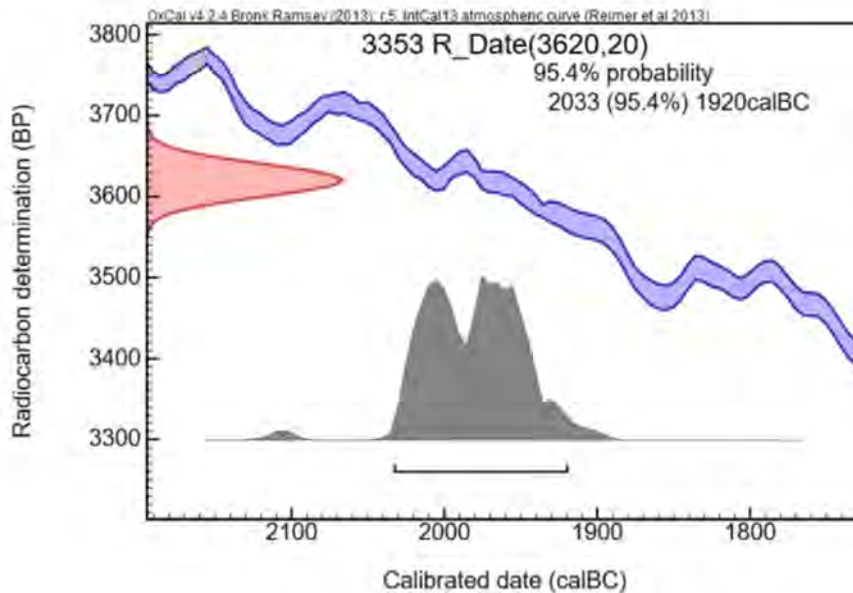
**Tree-Ring Services**  
 Oakraven Field Centre,  
 Jubilee Road,  
 Mitcheldean,  
 Gloucestershire, GL17 0EE

Tel: 01594 369 343  
 Mobile: 07786 591 536  
 E-mail: enquiries@tree-ring.co.uk  
 Website: www.tree-ring.co.uk

**Conventional radio carbon dating service**

Sample laboratory code	3353
Benzene mass	2,7421g
Counting time	3200 minutes
Sample count rate	16.583 CPM
Background count rate	0.583 CPM
Counting efficiency	73.61%
<b>Radiocarbon date</b>	<b>3620 ± 20 BP</b>
<b>Calibrated date (95.4% probability)</b>	<b>2033BC to 1920BC</b>

**Oxcal Calibrated date plot shown below**



Dr Andy Moir  
 Tree - Ring Services

Figure. 5 Radio Carbon dating calibrated plot





Plate.1 Working shot Area A, Trench 1, Bay 1. Facing South  
 Plate 2 Foundations (1003) (1004) Bay 1. Facing West  
 Plate 3 Foundations of bays 2 & 3 looking West. Return wall 1 in foreground  
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 Plate 5 Example of dressed stone tool marks in return wall 1  
 Plate 6 Sondage B [1008] (1005) (1006) (1011) Foundations Extending West. Bay 1





Plate. 7 Return wall 2 (1038) and possible floor area (1037). Facing East  
Plate. 8 Cut of Electric Cable [1008] between Foundation (1039) and rubble deposits (1004) Facing South. Pre-excavation

Plate. 9 Slot Through Robbed Trench [1014]. Facing West  
Plate. 10 Sondage's a & b, Return wall 1 (1012) and (1032) (1033). Facing North  
Plate. 11 Return Walls 1 & 2, With Central Floor Deposit (1037). Facing North  
Plate. 12 Return wall 1 (1032). Facing North





Plate 13 Return Walls 1 & 2, Facing East. Robbed trench [1014] and Prehistoric Area in Foreground (1034)

Plate 14 Wall (1039) Cobbles (1041) Return Wall 3 and Prehistoric Area, Oak Post in-situ (1025). Facing West

Plate 15 Trench 1 Post Excavation. Facing North  
 Plate 16 Prehistoric Post (1025) [1023] (1024) Pre-excavation  
 Plate 17 Prehistoric Post in situ pre-excavation  
 Plate 18 Prehistoric post in situ post excavation







*Plate 19 Cut for Prehistoric Posts*

*Plate 20 Carved stone from archway found in bay 2/3.*



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*Plate 21 Overview of the excavation of northern trench extension for Area A. 1*

*Plate 22 Excavation of northern trench extension for Area A. 1*

*Plate 23 General view of the northern trench extension for Area A. 1*

*Plate 24 General view of the northern trench extension for Area A. 1*



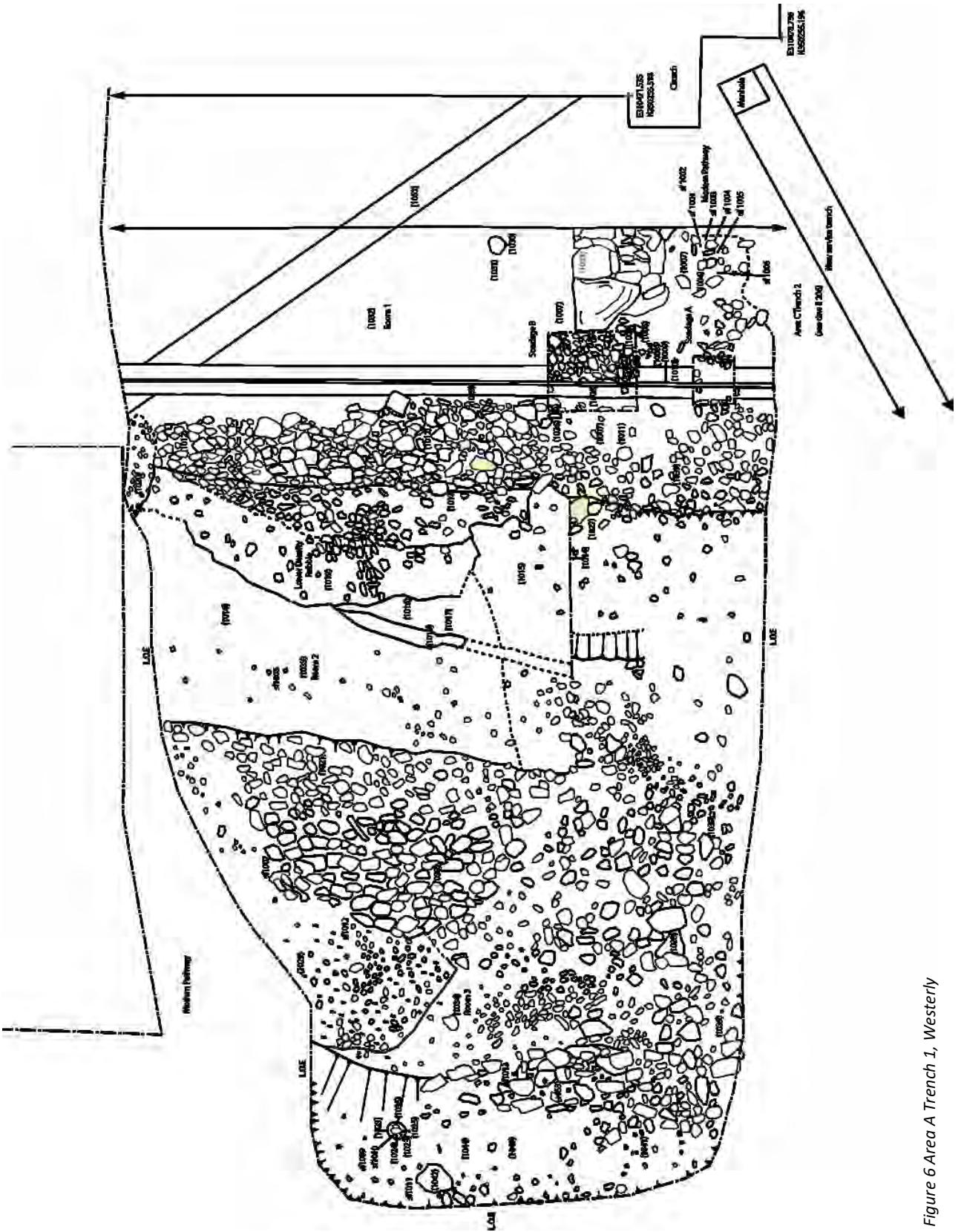


Figure 6 Area A Trench 1, Westerly



## **AREA B—TRENCH 1**

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### ***Introduction***

Area B lies to the South of the Church, the trench located predominantly within a 5M square, with an extension of several metres at the western end to investigate a rubble deposit. Planning permission was granted for a carpark in this area, therefore subject to a watching brief and excavation. Three human skeletons were identified. In addition, several animal burials. These were situated above the required agreed ground level for Car Park foundations. Consequently, all required exhumation.

All remains are to be appropriately reburied on the same consecrated ground and a full service is planned by Father Stephen Maxfield and his Parishioners. This is anticipated to take place in the latter part of 2018

### ***Excavation***

This phase of the excavation was undertaken intermittently between December 2016 and March 2017 by J. Green. This was completed with hand tools, the only exception being a machine excavated sondage for the reburial of inhumations, under close archaeological supervision.

### ***Results***

Top soil and subsoil had already been re-

moved during a recent watching brief. The results can be defined into several categories: Human burials, animal burials, and structural deposits. Inhumations

The first inhumation was burial (3012), of a female within a grave cut aligned west-east. The preservation was poor, and the grave had been cut by a later burial (3042). Numerous white Quartz pebbles appeared to have been deliberately placed around the Cranium and over the Sternum. The grave fill comprised compact dark brown clay silt.

A charnel pit containing two Craniums, (3006) (3036), was located against – and cut by – the foundations of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century brick wall delineating the boundary of the site to the East. This would suggest that there are further burials beyond this point and within the gardens of the neighbouring property. The rectangular cut was filled by dark yellowish pink grey and brown clay silt. No finds were within the pit. It was overlain by a layer of compact yellowish grey brown stony silt that was present across the whole of trench 3. A disarticulated left humerus and a fragmented right radius and ulna, suggested this charnel pit had been cut into an earlier grave that continued beyond the wall.

Immediately north of this burial was a grave cut (3039), aligned east-west, likely a further inhumation. This was below the required level of the car park and therefore unexcavated.

Directly against the south wall of the Church and the brick wall to the east a modern cremation was uncovered (3046). This consisted of a wooden box and name plate, containing ashes, dating to the year 1999. This was left undisturbed and in-situ after agreement between J. Green and Taylor Wimpey to offset the car park by 1m south.

In the trench bulk 1m from the southern boundary wall, a 1m square pit [3095] was carefully machine excavated in preparation for the reburial of the inhumations, animal remains and disarticulated bone. During excavation, several deeply buried skeletons (1.5m below ground) were encountered, therefore the pit was 'skewed' in several places to avoid these burials, which were untouched and left in situ. It is interesting to note that these burials appeared not to have been intercut, lay in undisturbed regular rows within what appeared to be virgin ground. Numerous quartz pebbles were placed on and around the skeletal remains. The soils in this area were of compact, clean fine yellow brown silts. At the base of the this sondage the ground comprised extremely compact large gravel and cobble stones with patches of yellow brown clay.

### ***Animal Burials***

There were six individual animal burials in total. A possible Canine burial, (yet to be scientifically analysed) (3015), located 0.65m from the South wall of the Church in a purposely dug grave. The sub-circular cut was filled with very compact dark blackish brown silt. Occa-

sional small cobble stones inclusions were within the fill and a fragment of medieval pottery was recovered.

Next to this lay an Avian burial thought to be a Goose (3018). The remains of which were in a very shallow circular grave cut, filled by friable, stony, orangey brown gritty silt.

Beside unexcavated grave cut (3029), a burial cut containing a pig was excavated (3024). This again was within a deliberately cut grave. Interestingly this burial had fragments of wood and numerous pieces of greyish black deteriorated leather (3038). This appeared to comprise coffin material. It cannot be conclusively stated – only postulated – that the animal was encased within a coffin prior to burial. This area is highly disturbed by grave cuts and modern landscaping, which was evident in the case of this feature, therefore, the coffin material could come from a disturbed human inhumation.

A larger burial cut lay to 1m north of the pig burial and contained a Mammal that had possibly died giving birth (3027), due to multiple skeletons of neo-nates in the abdomen and one of these in the pelvic area, (3075). This lay within a sub-square – sub-rounded cut, filled by mid to dark brown fine stony silt. On top of this, covering the lower half of the mammal skeleton was a modern dumping of 6 fowl (3030). No pottery or dating evidence was present within the grave fill apart from a stray coffin nail. The burial was located up against earlier buttress foundations, (3054), medieval in date and now collapsed and 17<sup>th</sup> Century brick wall (3032). Interestingly the skeleton was sealed by a layer of small fragments of



mortar debris, (3034), suggesting it could have been placed in the ground prior to the collapse of the buttress, which is currently unknown, (but had certainly disappeared before paintings were created in the 1800's). The grave fill of the mammal was cut by a circular posthole with a similar fill [3045], of unknown date.

Grave cut [3053] was oval in shape with clearly defined edges and contained a double animal burial of a calf (3052) and a pig (3051). These were laid end to end in a symmetrical fashion, the calf cranium to the east end of the grave and the pig to the west. No butchery marks or signs of disease were found on the bones. A single worked yellowish white unburnt flint was located between the calf's ribs. It is unclear if this was intentionally placed or merely residual. The grave fill comprised very compact mid orangey brown silt with small gravel stone inclusions.

A second possible canine burial (3056) was located against buttress foundations

(3054). This grave cut and skeleton had been disturbed by foundations of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century brick wall to the East at the pelvic area. This feature also contained the skeleton of a neonate (3081), separately deposited, by the feet of the adult. This deposit was also disturbed by rooting. The fill was of dark grey brown clay silt with occasional sub angular small stones. No finds were discovered but it appears to predate the wall of the 1600's.

### ***Structural Deposits***

#### *Threshold Feature*

Stone work within the South wall of the current Church displays anomalies suggestive of alteration at an earlier point in its history (3065). Ground below this anomaly was investigated to reveal a series of stone slabs forming a threshold. This feature was situated 0.50m below previously stripped ground surface and comprised one large pale grey smooth stone (3058) a second slightly smaller stone of the same material (3076) and two Grinshill stones (3060) and (3076). In addition, part of a cobbled surface (3073) was uncovered directly in front of this group of stones. The first and largest of these stones, measured 0.90m in length, 0.43m in width and was 0.16m in depth. The south facing front of the stone displayed tool markings to dress the stone and suggest it was intended to be visible. The stone next to it was slightly smaller, measuring 0.48m in length, 0.23m in width. The exact depth of this stone and the two Grinshill stones could not be ascertained due to time constraints. The Grinshill stone on the west side of the main slab had a rectangular socket cut into it, suggesting an aperture to take an upright post for a door. The Grinshill stone to the east of the smaller slab was inserted in an upright position. No dating evidence of finds were present. This feature was left in-situ with a view to further excavation during a planned phase 2 in the near future. A recently created French drain (3062) lies above this feature preventing the exact rela-

tionship to the current wall from being investigated. A piece of carbonised timber was found 0.20m East of the stones. It is not clear if this is associated with the threshold or a stray find, due to the level of ground disturbance when the drain was created. A clear cut for the stones was not found at this time, however, the silt around the stones was extremely soft and suggestive of a fill. Further work in this area would likely establish the presence of a cut.

### ***Rubble Spread (3047)***

This feature comprises a dense irregular spread of small angular red sandstones, ranging between 0.10m – 0.30m in size. Occasional pale whitish grey smooth stones are present within the deposit, as are several Grinshill sandstones. The area measures approximately 2.5m East to West, 2.5m north to south. It is heavily disturbed to the Southern edge by a burnt deposit (3080) that extends into the trench bulk. The deposit was not excavated at this time. To the north eastern edge, the stones form a right angle and appeared to continue eastwards at some stage before being cut by later burial deposits. The western extent of the spread is cut by a modern land drain [3049]. It is likely that this rubble deposit is collapse of an earlier building, possibly such as a Porticus or southern Isle. It is also possible that it has a connection with the threshold that lies approximately 5m to the north east.

### ***Buttress Foundations (3054)***

At the north east corner of Trench 3 and abutting the south wall of the Church, buttress foundations were uncovered relating to an earlier phase of the Church. This feature measures 1.10m Square and comprise large pieces of flat, red subangular edged sandstones and one Grinshill sandstone. Bonding material in the form of yellowish white lime-based mortar was lying between and over the stones. The depth of the foundation was not ascertained and left in-situ. The buttress would have obscured the current window of the church at the east end, therefore, must relate to an earlier phase before the current window was inserted, unless it was of a much lower build than the buttress at the west end depicted in paintings in the 1700's. There are aligning anomalies in the south wall at this point (3070), likely related to alterations connected with the buttress.

### ***Miscellaneous Stones***

Within the walls of the Church, particularly on the southern wall, there are a number of stones with interesting tool marks and one with the initials GJ and numerals, (illegible due to erosion), carved into it (3066). This could represent a Stone Masons mark or graffiti, possibly even a grave marker. The stone has likely been reused and incorporated during

repairs, as situated towards the top of the wall and too high to reach easily.

### ***Foundations of South Wall***

Upon agreement with the developers and A. Wigley, an area was excavated to provide a space for reburials of the lifted inhumations in the form of a sondage [3071]. This was located directly against the South wall close to the buttress foundations. The sondage revealed the foundations extended a further 0.75m below the current stripped ground level and comprised large flat sandstones, underlying rubble and large cobble stones to a final depth of 0.90m. The size of this excavated area measured 1.65m by 1.7m depth to accommodate new caskets for the skeletal remains. J. Green had concerns that the position and depth, (the depth agreed after consultation with the Ministry of Justice), would destabilise the Church as it would need to remain open for some time and the Church has no modern solid foundations. Subsequently after recording the rubble foundation layer, the area was backfilled and relocated further South.

### ***Small Finds***

As in Trench 1, small finds from secure deposits are listed below and categorised according to material. All small finds will be subject to further expert analysis when funding has been raised by the Church.

### ***Copper***

*2 fragments of rolled Copper from Burial (3012) <3002>*

*1 Shroud Pin from Burial (3012) <3008>*

### ***Iron***

*4 Coffin nails from Burial (3024) Coffin (3038) <3004>*

### ***Leather***

*9 Leather fragments from Burial (3024) Coffin (3038) <3006>*

### ***Wood***

*1 small piece of wood from Burial (3024) Coffin (3038) <3005>*

*1 piece of carbonised wood from (3082) <3007>*

### ***Stone***

*7 Quartz pebbles from Burial (3012)*

*16 Quartz pebbles from Burial (3050)*

*1 Flint fragment from Burial (3050) <3009>*

### ***Mortar/Plaster***

*15 pieces of mortar/plaster from (3054) above Burial (3027)*

### ***Pottery***

*1 large fragment of floor tile from (3047) <3003>*



### **Unstratified Finds**

#### **Metal**

*14 pieces assorted corroded Iron*

*1 piece of Bloom*

*1 piece of Lead*

#### **Stone**

*2 Flint fragments*

*6 pieces of Chert*

*1 scribing tool*

#### **Shell**

*3 pieces of Oyster shell*

#### **Daub**

*3 pieces*

#### **Pottery**

*5 fragments of floor tile*

*19 sherds of mixed fabric pottery*

*1 clay pipe bowl*

Unexpectedly, various animal burials were also encountered. This is unusual upon known consecrated ground and the possibility of them pre-dating the Church was considered. However, given their position in the stratigraphy, (high within the graveyard in comparison to human burials), they are likely to be of relatively modern deposition and most likely date to the 1900's, when prior to the current ownership, the area was used to graze farm animals. Although the lack of modern debris within the graves – considering the extremely high level of 20<sup>th</sup> Century pottery covering the site – is puzzling. It would be expected to reasonably encounter sherds of the modern pottery within the grave fills. Dating evidence will be compiled when Church funding allows for analysis to be undertaken on both the human and animal burials to establish firm dating sequences.

### **SUMMARY**

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Excavations within Area B revealed inhumations which was expected within a known graveyard. Structural remains of a small ancillary building on the south side of the Church were unearthed during top soil stripping. These had not been noted on previously undertaken geophysical surveys.



Plate 25 Buttress Foundation (3054). Facing East  
Plate 26 Buttress Foundations (3054) and Animal Burial (3027) (3075). Facing North

Plate 27 Animal Burial (3027)  
Plate 28 Animal Burial (3027) with Neonates (3075)  
Plate 29 Animal Burial (3027) (3075) (3030)  
Plate 30 Double Animal Burial (3051) (3052) [3053]. Facing





Plate 31 Rubble Spread (3047). Facing North

Plate 32 Rubble Spread (3047). Facing North

Plate 33 Foundations of South Wall of Church (3067) (3068) (3069). Facing North

Plate 34 Animal Burial (3056) [3057] Between Buttress (3054) and Wall (3032). Facing North

Plate 35 Animal Burial (3015). Facing North

Plate 36 hold Stones (3058) (3061) and French Drain (3053). Facing North







*Plate 37 Carved Initially in Upper Portion of South East Church Wall (3066). Facing North East*

*Plate 38 Avian Burial (3018). Facing North*

*Plate 39 Animal Burial (3024) with Coffin Material. Facing East*

*Plate 40 Skull (3036). Facing East*

*Plate 41 Skull (3006) and Skull (3036). Facing East*



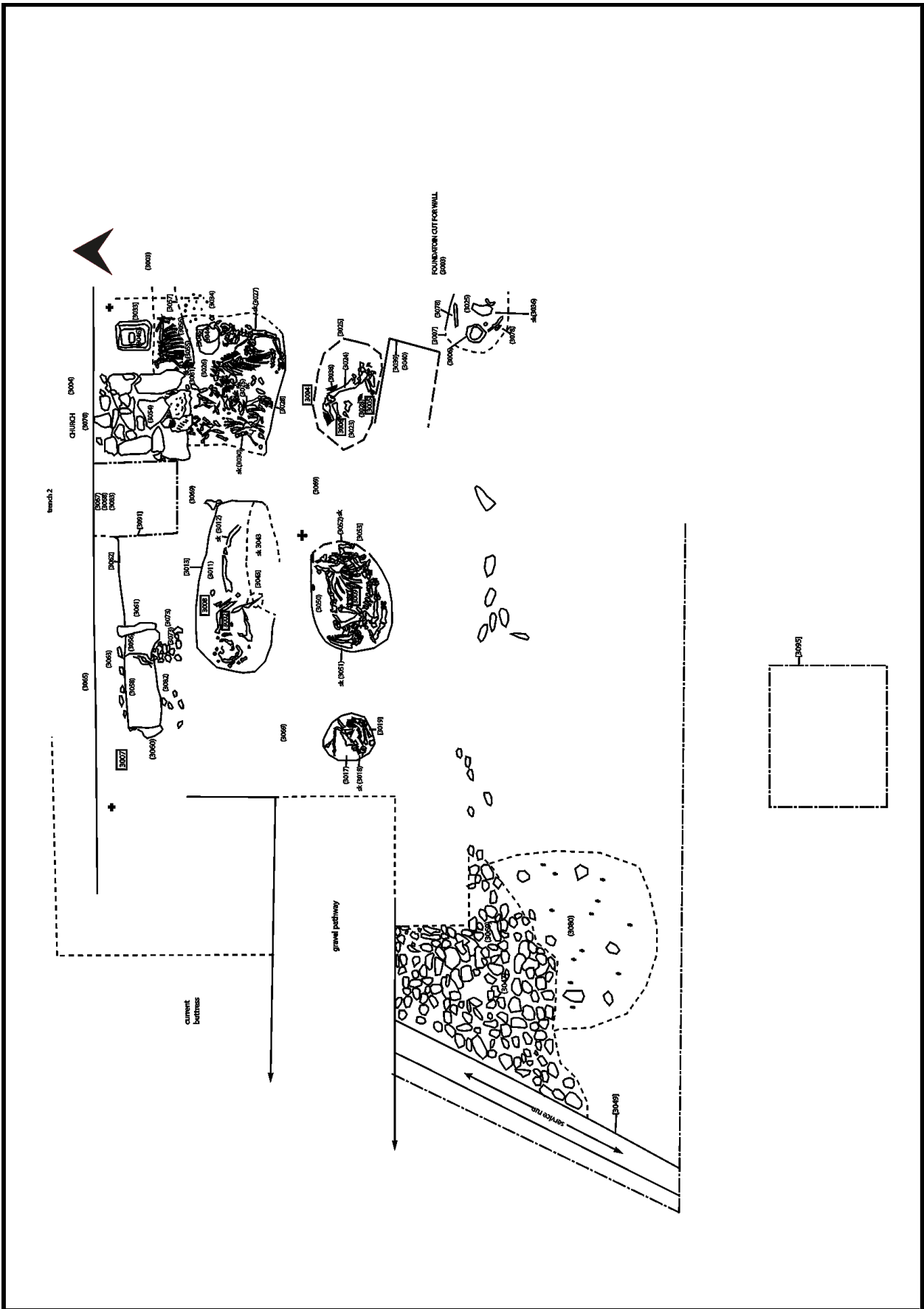


Figure. 7 Area B Trench 3



## AREA C—TRENCH 2

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### *Introduction*

As part of the ongoing refurbishment of the Church, a service run was created to provide water and waste pipes, with connecting man-holes. This service trench was carefully positioned to avoid impacting on any already established archaeological deposits. It was placed where there was a low to medium chance of encountering any inhumations. The trench is situated from the outer western corner of the south wall of the Church, extending for 15.7m in a north east/south westerly direction whereupon it connects to services on land belonging to the developers, Taylor Wimpey.

### *Watching Brief*

Trench 2 was excavated by mechanical digger under close archaeological observation on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The trench measured 15.7m in length, 0.70m in width with a depth of between 0.70 and 0.80m. Conditions were fine and dry, and the trench backfilled after completion of service connections on January 13<sup>th</sup>.

### *Results*

Turf, topsoil and subsoil were removed where still present, much of which had already been

removed due to associated works. Topsoil depth varied across the trench with a maximum depth of 0.28m. Subsoil depth averaged 0.12m. A rubble deposit (2003) was encountered around an electric cable [2007] running through the trench 0.14m below stripped ground surface, aligned north south. The rubble is likely associated with collapse from the earlier phases of Church walling uncovered 1.2m to the North. although could possibly represent the ephemeral remains of further foundations. The rubble showed no evidence of bonding material and was not visible in section. This was carefully examined, hand cleaned and recorded. This feature had been heavily disturbed by the cut of the electric pipe. The depth of the rubble was 0.15m max. It was then removed to continue the trench.

No other archaeological deposits were encountered. The natural ground comprised silty colluvium and gravels, becoming dense towards the base of the trench. No finds were recovered.

### *Summary*

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No definite archaeological features were present within trench 2. The modern services were successfully installed.

### *Drawings*

To be added when digitisation is complete. Hard copies have been provided to the Church in the interim.





Plate 42 Route of Service Trench Pre-excavation. Facing East  
Plate 43 Service Trench Mid-Excavation Depicting Rubble (2008)  
and Electric Cable (2006)

Plate 44 Base of Excavated Service Trench. Facing East  
Plate 41 Base of Service Trench. Facing West  
Plate 46 North Facing Section of Service Trench and Electric  
Cable





## **AREA D—TRENCH 4**

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### ***Introduction***

On the last day of this phase of works a test pit was excavated in the garden of the house behind the Church. This was intended to investigate the possibility of any further foundations extending eastwards. The test pit was inserted in line with and 3.5m east of the current north wall.

### ***Test Pit Excavation Results***

The test pit was dug on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017 during extreme storm conditions, by W. Hewson and J. Green. It measured 1.3m in length and 1m width. Turf and topsoil were removed by hand and present to a depth of 0.15m. The topsoil comprised light to mid yellowish-brown clay silt with small gritty stone inclusions. Occasional pieces of cbm were present. The owners of the garden stated they have brought in this deposit from elsewhere.

The subsoil was mid to dark grey brown clay silt with inclusions of small angular sandstones, 0.25m in depth.

At 0.44m below ground level, foundation deposits (4004) were encountered. These comprised several large, red sandstones, Grinshill sandstones and another paler type of sandstone on the southern edge with a rubble core to the north. This feature was within a yellowish-brown silt deposit. Numerous fragments of plaster and possibly bonding material were present, but not visible directly between the stones. Although this was a very small area that was examined, the stones visible above ground appeared to be forming a semi-circular curve running south east and deposits were continuing in north, south, east and west into the trench bulk. This foundation aligns to the position of the current Church wall to the west and is likely to represent an earlier phase of the Church, possibly an Apse. Further stones were ascertained to continue below this depth but not excavated at this time. The foundations uncovered

were recorded and left in-situ, therefore their depth was not ascertained. A freshwater Oyster shell was found within the silt.

### ***Summary***

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From the limited excavation undertaken in this area it would appear that the Church extended further East at some point in time, and it is likely that further foundations and footprints of an earlier phase of building are present. A more comprehensive series of work would be needed to draw any firm conclusions as to the nature of this structure. There is evidence of an abundance of worked stone in neighbouring gardens, that occupants claim is from the Church site. In the cellar of adjacent Sutton House, the property rumoured to have once been a Medieval Hall, worked Grinshill and other sandstones form part of the early construction of the property. These large pieces of stone are believed to have come from the ruins of the now collapsed area west of the current Church.





*Plate 47 North Wall of Present Church*

*Plate 48 Western End of Northern Church Wall*

*Plate 49 Southern End of East Wall of Current Church*

*Plate 50 Mid-section of East Wall of Church Depicting Alterations*

*Plate 51 Eastern Wall of Church Facing North from Within Neighbouring Garden*

*Plate 52 Test Pit Eastern End of Church*





Plate 53 Test Pit Facing North Depicting Farmhouse  
Plate 54 West Facing Section of Test Pit. Foundations (4004)  
Plate 55 Example of stonework from Church in neighbouring garden.





## **CONCLUDING DISCUSSION OF PHASE 1**

It is abundantly clear from the limited excavations of Phase 1, that this now outwardly unassuming Church was once much larger. The unearthing of a further 18m of building foundations to the west, the probability of additional structures to the north, south and east, would indicate a place of significant importance during Medieval times. The references historically of the Church during St. Milburgh's time as Abbess, together with the archaeological findings, hint towards a stronger connection with Much Wenlock Priory. Further investigation and excavation is essential to understand the importance of this religious site and how it functioned throughout its history.

Prehistoric remains discovered during the excavation would appear to correlate directly to other findings of the same period in the direct vicinity; principally those of Jenks at 'Sharpstones D' and surrounding area. It is anticipated to further demonstrate this during Phase 2. It is possible that this site was chosen as a building place for this Church as a well-established and revered holy/special place.

Research of written records is currently ongoing, although appears to be scant. The only certain way to reveal more of this important history is through careful archaeological excavation.

## **PHASE 2 OUTLINE PROPOSALS**

A proposal for phase 2 of excavations is going to be drawn up, to be executed subject to necessary permissions, as and when funding allows. These will include further investigation into known archaeological deposits uncovered

in phase 1, and new excavations on surrounding land recently acquired by the Church. Grants will be proactively applied for, by the Church, to enable these to take place. A full report including dating analysis of all finds mentioned in this interim report will then be presented.

## **PUBLICATION AND ARCHIVING**

All findings of this interim report, will be compiled into a full report and distributed to the Client; The Very Reverend Protospesbyter Stephen Maxfield and the relevant authorities; Andy Wigley at Shropshire Council Planning Services Department, and the Museum of Shrewsbury.

Copies of the final report (PDF or Hard Copy) will be supplied to Andy Wigley at Shropshire Council, The Church of the Holy Fathers and published online. OASIS Project Reporting systems shall be completed at the relevant stages of the project and a full copy of the completed report filed as Grey literature.

The site archive will be prepared to specifications in the ClfA Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives (2008), to be deposited with the Shrewsbury Museum.

The finds shall be retained by the church and displayed in a way that is to be decided by Father Stephen Maxfield and his Parishioners.

***Acknowledgments:***

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Grateful thanks go to the following People;

Father Stephen and Catherine, for their hospitality and unending enthusiasm for this project.

The parishioners of the Church, for making us so welcome and cheerfully putting up with the disruption caused by the excavation, and their access to and from the Church. Dr. Andrew Wigley; the Historic Environment Manager of Shropshire Council, for his consultation. Taylor Wimpey Managers and ground staff for all their co-operation and assistance. Mr & Mrs Otter for allowing us to excavate on their property. Veronica Davies for inviting the fieldwork team to reside in her house for much of the excavation. Finally, the fieldwork staff, Will Hewson, David Thompson and Scott Peers.





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