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# **St. Mary's Church, Astbury, Cheshire.**

## **December 2013**

aeon archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief  
Project Code: A0016.1  
Report no. 0026

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# **St Mary's Church, Astbury, Chester, Cheshire. December 2013**

Report no. 0026 v1.0

Archaeological Watching Brief  
Aeon Archaeology  
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Chester  
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Project Code: A0016.1  
Date: 11/12/2013  
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# Figures

**Figure 01:** Location of watching brief area. Scale 1:4,000 at A4.

**Figure 02:** Location of watching brief area and location/orientation of photographs. Scale 1:100 at A4.

**Figure 03:** Plan of wall (1003), vault (1009), and steps (1008). Scale 1:50 at A4.

**Figure 04:** Profile of church yard walls (1002) and (1003). Scale 1:10 at A4.

# Plates

**Plate 01:** Churchyard wall (1002) prior to demolition, from the south.

**Plate 02:** Wall packing stones (1010), from the southwest.

**Plate 03:** Former churchyard wall (1003), from the southwest.

**Plate 04:** Former churchyard wall (1003), from the northwest.

**Plate 05:** Burial vault (1001), from the southwest.

**Plate 06:** Burial vault (1009), from the southwest.

**Plate 07:** Stone steps (1008) with carved stone (small find: 023), from the southwest.

**Plate 08:** Stone steps (1008) with carved stone (small find: 023), from the northwest.

**Plate 09:** Carved stone (small find: 023).

**Plate 10:** Carved stone (small find: 023).

**Plate 11:** Boiler vault (1011), from the southwest.

**Plate I:** Recovered artefacts small finds 001, 002, and 006.

**Plate II:** Recovered artefacts small finds 007 and 008.

**Plate III:** Recovered artefacts small finds 011, 012, and 013.

**Plate IV:** Recovered artefacts small finds 014, 015, 016, and 017.

**Plate V:** Recovered disarticulated human bone small find 018.

**Plate VI:** Recovered artefacts small finds 019, 020, 021, and 022.

**Plate VII:** Recovered artefacts small finds 024, 025, 026, and 027.

**Plate VIII:** Recovered artefacts small finds 028, 029, 032, 033, and 034.

**Plate IX:** Recovered artefacts small finds 030.



## Contents

1.0	NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY .....	2
2.0	INTRODUCTION AND AKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
3.0	PROJECT AIMS.....	4
4.0	METHODOLOGY .....	6
4.1	Watching Brief.....	6
4.2	Data Collection from Site Records .....	6
4.3	Artefact Methodology .....	6
4.4	Environmental Samples Methodology .....	6
4.5	Storage and curation .....	7
4.6	Report and dissemination.....	7
5.0	HISTORY OF THE SITE .....	8
6.0	QUANTIFICATION OF RESULTS .....	9
6.1	The Documentary Archive.....	9
6.2	Environmental Samples .....	9
6.3	Artefacts.....	9
7.0	SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF THE MATERIAL ARCHIVE .....	10
8.0	RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF.....	14
9.0	CONCLUSION.....	17
10.0	SOURCES.....	18
	APPENDIX I – DETAILS OF RECORDED CONTEXTS .....	19
	APPENDIX II – GAZETTEER OF ARTEFACTS .....	20
	APPENDIX III – PROJECT DESIGN FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF .....	22



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## 1.0 Non Technical Summary

## 1.0 NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Aeon Archaeology was commissioned by Graham Holland Associates to carry out an archaeological watching brief as a condition of a planning application (ref: **11/3930C**) during the demolition of part of the churchyard wall for the installation of a disabled access ramp at St. Mary's Church, Astbury, Cheshire (NGR **SJ 84621 61526**).

The watching brief maintained during the demolition of the churchyard wall and excavation of the church bank revealed the presence of an earlier version of the churchyard wall. This wall was situated to the immediate north of the existing churchyard wall and despite not producing any artefactual evidence, was proved to be contextually earlier than the existing wall. Moreover, a set of four stones forming three steps were discovered which almost certainly refer to an earlier access through the churchyard wall which has since gone out of use. These steps could not be proven to be stratigraphically associated with the earlier churchyard wall; however it is likely that the two features were contemporary.

In addition, the lowest stone of the three steps had been reused from elsewhere and carried an incised stone carving of a single horizontal line beneath four zigzags. The stone type was of a grey sandstone and identical to that of the medieval wheel-cross stone housed in the church boiler room. Furthermore, the zigzag tegulation is of a type seen on medieval stone carvings, and there is a possibility that the stone originally formed part of the base of the wheel-cross stone.

The watching brief also observed and recorded two red-brick burial vaults of the late Victorian era and belonging to the Lowndes Moir family.

In addition to the possible medieval carved stone, the earliest artefacts recovered were five fragments of medieval tile, as well as sherds of ceramic dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> /20<sup>th</sup> centuries, clay pipe, glass fragments, animal bone, and disarticulated human bones. The latter consisted of 109 fragments of bone scattered within the subsoil deposit.

The archaeological watching brief has succeeded in determining a stratigraphical sequence to this part of the churchyard of St. Mary's and has also proven the high probability for further discovery of artefacts and archaeological remains within the churchyard boundary.



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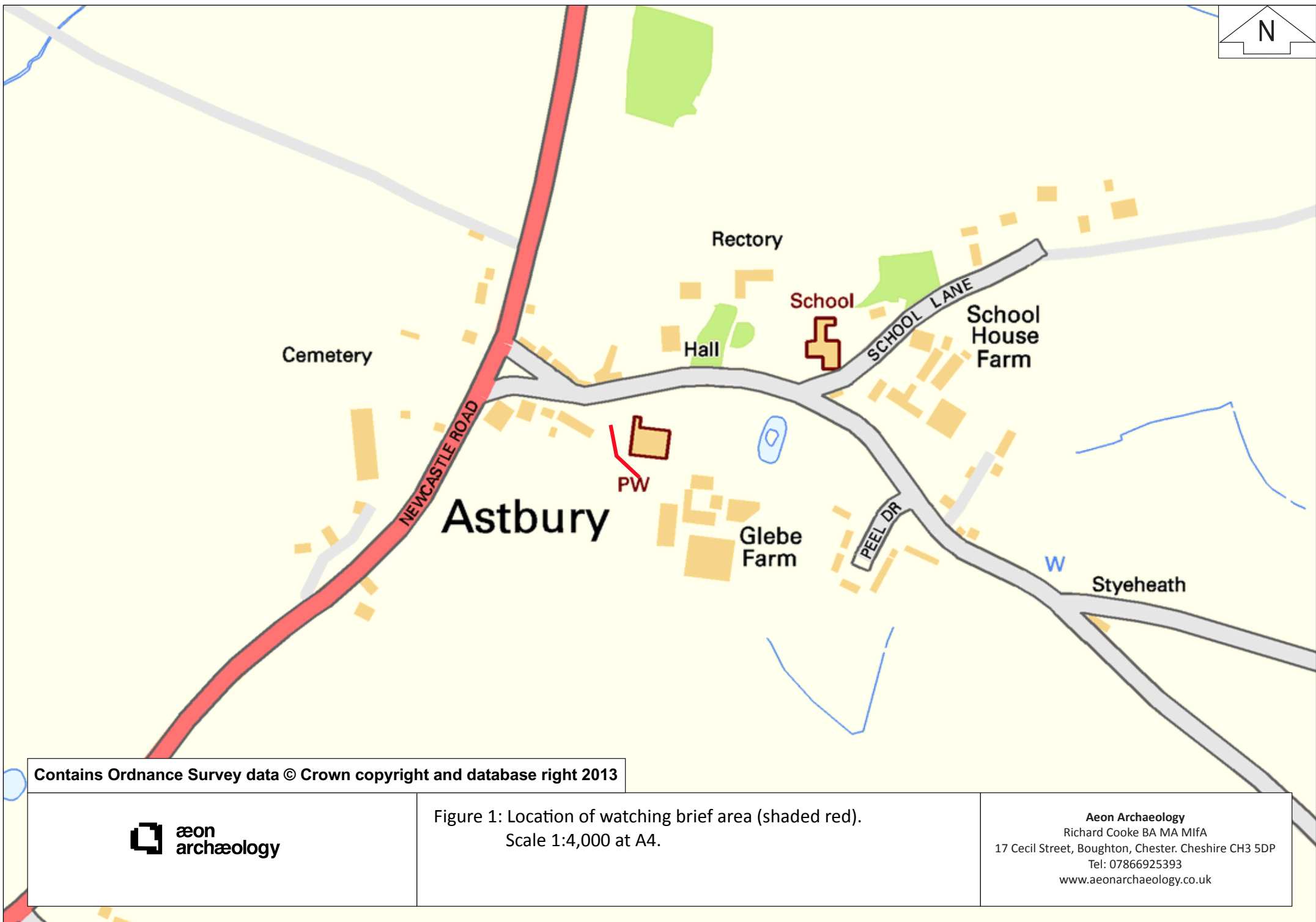
## 2.0 Introduction and Acknowledgements

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION AND AKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Aeon Archaeology was commissioned by Graham Holland Associates to carry out an archaeological watching brief as a condition of a planning application (ref: **11/3930C**) during the demolition of part of the churchyard wall for the installation of a disabled access ramp at St. Mary's Church, Astbury, Cheshire (NGR **SJ 84621 61526**) (figure 1).

The area requiring monitoring by watching brief lay approximately 7.0m southwest of St. Mary's Church and comprised approximately 18.0m length of churchyard wall, which required removal and cutting back of the churchyard bank to accommodate a new wall and disabled access ramp. The wall had been listing severely along this stretch and required realigning as part of the works. The intention of the works was to cut back the bank by 1.0m, however this was often dictated by the presence of known burials and as such the amount was often less than 1.0m. In addition to the monitored work, approximately 9.5m of wall to the immediate northwest had the upper two courses of stone removed and re-set in order to realign the wall. This work did not require the cutting back of the churchyard bank and as such was not monitored by the archaeological watching brief.

The following people and organisations are thanked for their help and contribution to the project: Mr. Mark Leah of the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service; Mr. Gary Crawford-Coupe of Cornerstone Archaeology Ltd; Mr. Leah Dodd of Earthworks Archaeology; Grosvenor Construction; the Church Warden Mr. Bill Ball; and the Rector of St. Mary's Church the Reverend Jonathan Sharples.





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### 3.0 Project Aims

### 3.0 PROJECT AIMS

The aim of the works was to monitor and where relevant characterise the known, or potential, archaeological remains uncovered during the dismantling, cutting back, and realignment of the churchyard wall.

- The principal archaeological interest derives from the fact that the site is located in proximity to the church of St. Mary which is a grade I Listed Building (ref: 1138740). In addition, the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of the *Standing Cross in St. Mary's Churchyard* (SAM: 1,020, 625) and the *Canopied tomb in St Mary's Churchyard* (SAM: 1,017,059) are located within the church grounds.

A design brief for the project was not produced by the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service, however correspondence dated 21/11/2011 (Ref: letters/dfwb/cec/con/112979con) detailed that:

‘No development shall take place within the area until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority.’

The broad aims of the archaeological watching brief were determined to be:

- To determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains on the site, the integrity of which may be threatened by works at the site.
- To establish the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusion to sub-surface deposits and, where the data allows, assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits of archaeological significance.

The detailed objectives of the archaeological watching brief were determined to be:

- Insofar as possible within methodological constraints, to explain any temporal, spatial or functional relationships between the structures/remains identified, and any relationships between these and the archaeological and historic elements of the wider landscape.
- Where the data allows, identify the research implications of the site with reference to the regional research agenda and recent work in Cheshire.

An Archaeological Project Design (appendix III) was written by Aeon Archaeology and submitted to Graham Holland Associates and the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service in May 2013. This formed the basis of a method statement submitted for the work. The archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with this Project Design.

The management of this project has followed the procedures laid out in the standard professional guidance *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment Project Manager's Guide* (English Heritage 2006), and in the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1994 rev. 2001 and 2008). Five stages are specified:

- Phase 1: project planning
- Phase 2: fieldwork

- Phase 3: assessment of potential for analysis and revised project design
- Phase 4: analysis and report preparation
- Phase 5: dissemination

The current document reports on the phase 4 analysis and states the means to be used to disseminate the results. The purpose of this phase is to carry out the analysis identified in phase 3 (the assessment of potential phase), to amalgamate the results of the specialist studies, if required, with the detailed site narrative and provide both specific and overall interpretations. The site is to be set in its landscape context so that its full character and importance can be understood. All the information is to be presented in a report that will be held by Cheshire Historic Environment Record so that it can be accessible to the public and future researchers. This phase of work also includes archiving the material and documentary records from the project.



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## 4.0 Methodology

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Watching Brief**

(Reproduced from IFA. 2001. *Institute for Archaeologists 1994 rev. 2001 and 2008 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*)

The definition of an archaeological watching brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive.

This definition and standard do not cover chance observations, which should lead to an appropriate archaeological project being designed and implemented, nor do they apply to monitoring for preservation of remains *in situ*.

An archaeological watching brief is divided into four categories according to the IFA. 2001. *Institute for Archaeologists 2001 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*:

- comprehensive (present during all ground disturbance)
- intensive (present during sensitive ground disturbance)
- intermittent (viewing the trenches after machining)
- partial (as and when seems appropriate).

An intensive watching brief was maintained during the excavation of the dismantling, cutting back, and realignment of the churchyard wall.

### **4.2 Data Collection from Site Records**

A database of the site photographs was produced to enable active long-term curation of the photographs and easy searching. The site records were checked and cross-referenced and photographs, plans and finds were cross-referenced to contexts. These records were used to write the site narrative and the field drawings and survey data were used to produce an outline plan of the site.

All paper field records were scanned to provide a backup digital copy. The photographs were organised and precisely cross-referenced to the digital photo record so that the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) can curate them in their active digital storage facility.

### **4.3 Artefact Methodology**

All artefacts were collected and processed including those found within spoil tips. Finds numbers were attributed and they were bagged and labelled as well as any preliminary identification taking place on site. After processing, all artefacts were cleaned and examined in-house at Aeon Archaeology.

### **4.4 Environmental Samples Methodology**

The sampling strategy and requirement for bulk soil samples was related to the perceived character, interpretational importance and chronological significance of the strata under investigation. This ensured that only significant features would be sampled. The aim of the sampling strategy was to recover carbonised macroscopic plant remains, small artefacts particularly knapping debris and evidence for metalworking.

#### **4.5 Storage and curation**

The artefacts are currently the property of the landowner but it is strongly recommended that these are donated to a museum for long-term storage.

The finds have been prepared for deposition according to the Museum and Gallery's established guidelines. A full inventory of the archive has been created to aid accession.

#### **4.6 Report and dissemination**

This report will be placed within the public domain by submitting it to the Cheshire Historic Environment Record within 6 months of completion unless the client specifically requests the report to remain confidential for a longer period. The report will also be made available through a site notification form deposited with the Oasis Project.



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## 5.0 History of the site

## **5.0 HISTORY OF THE SITE**

The earliest evidence of occupation of this part of Cheshire dates to the Neolithic period and is demonstrated by the discovery of perforated axe-hammers (ref. 873609 and 76300) to the south and northwest of Astbury respectively. Further evidence of the Neolithic period has been found within proximity to the village with a Neolithic earthen long barrow (ref. 76295) surviving as an earthwork on the western outskirts of Congleton.

Additional evidence of the prehistoric period has been dated to the Bronze Age, with burial urns (ref. 76289 and 76275) being found to the west and southwest of the village; a late Bronze Age socketed axe (ref. 76269) being found to the northeast; and a log-boat being found in the bed of a stream in 1923 in Newbold Astbury. The log-boat's measurements and date are unknown; however it was not in complete condition and had a square cross-section with vertical sides. Two holes in the boat were interpreted as being for oars. The boat was last known to be in the Manchester Museum (HER).

The Roman period is evidenced by the Roman camp at Bent Farm (SAM. 1014116) which survives well in spite of the loss of a portion on the south side. The survival of earthwork remains is particularly unusual in this part of England. The bank and ditch are still defined and the bank stands 0.4m high in some places. The interior will contain extensive remains of buildings and the pits and hollows associated with military settlement. In addition there is a well preserved ridge and furrow system which overlies the interior and will have preserved the remains beneath the ploughsoil.

Astbury parish church is recorded in the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (1163/1/1) as being the centre of an extensive medieval parish, with the current church containing much 14<sup>th</sup> century work, with evidence of earlier phases. The presence of a Saxon cross fragment demonstrates the site's importance in the pre-Conquest period and the extensive graveyard has been in use for many centuries as evidenced by the medieval tombs to the north of the church which are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.



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## 6.0 Quantification of results

## 6.0 QUANTIFICATION OF RESULTS

### 6.1 The Documentary Archive

The following documentary records were created during the archaeological watching brief.

Context sheets	11
Watching brief day sheets	9
Drawings	4
Digital photographs	93

### 6.2 Environmental Samples

No environmental samples were taken as part of the watching brief as no suitable archaeological deposits were encountered.

### 6.3 Artefacts

Agate ware (18 <sup>th</sup> Century):	1
Black Ware (17 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> Century):	8
Staffordshire-type mottled ware (late 17 <sup>th</sup> -mid 18 <sup>th</sup> Century):	2
Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware (1720s-1740s):	9
Staffordshire-type slipware: buff bodied (late 17 <sup>th</sup> -early 18 <sup>th</sup> Century):	1
Staffordshire-type slipware: red-bodied (late 17 <sup>th</sup> -mid 18 <sup>th</sup> Century):	1
Stoneware (18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> Century)	20
Other 19 <sup>th</sup> Century wares	2
Clay pipe fragments:	18
Animal bone:	1
Human bone:	109
Glass:	2
Medieval tile:	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>



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## 7.0 Summary assessment of the material archive

## 7.0 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF THE MATERIAL ARCHIVE

by

L. J. Dodd BSc, PGDip, MIfA

### Summary

This report summarises the pottery, clay tobacco pipe, ceramic floor tiles and glass recovered from an archaeological watching brief undertaken at St. Mary's church, Astbury, near Congleton, Cheshire. The finds were recovered from a single stratigraphic context (1006).

The pottery was quantified by sherd count, weight, and estimated minimum number of vessels (MNV), according to ware names commonly in use by archaeological ceramic specialists across the North West and West Midlands regions.

Numbers in brackets relate to the small finds number contained within the site finds register.

### The Post-Medieval Pottery

The watching brief produced a total of 44 sherds of post-medieval pottery with a combined weight of 1624g, representing an estimated maximum number of 28 vessels. The pottery spans the period from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century through to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The pottery was in good condition overall although highly fragmented with most sherds representing a single vessel. The pottery is in stable condition and requires no long-term storage requirements.

#### *Fabrics and Forms: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century*

##### Agate Ware

A single sherd of agate ware (AGAT) weighing 9g was recovered. This sherd (008b) was from the body of a rounded vessel, possibly a bowl or similar open vessel. Agate ware was produced in north Staffordshire from c. 1730 and was popular through to the 1760s or early 1770s (Barker & Halfpenny 1990, 31).

##### Blackware

Eight sherds of blackware (BLACK) totalling 210g were recovered. Vessels represented at the coarse end of this ware included a flared bowl (001) with everted rim, and body sherds from a number of jars (020/027). The finer, thinner-walled vessel forms were limited to mugs (011/014) of probable straight-sided types.

##### Staffordshire-type mottled ware

A total of two sherds of Staffordshire-type mottled ware (STMO) – a ware not exclusively manufactured in north Staffordshire – weighing 25g were recovered. The vessel forms comprised a dish or bowl (021) and the rim and handle from a rounded cup or porringer (028). The ware was current during from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century through to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

##### Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware

A total of nine sherds, weighing 152g, of Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware (STRSB) – also referred to as slip-coated ware – were recovered and, along with blackware, this ware dominates the assemblage. Forms were limited to straight-sided mugs and rounded cups (008a/020b/027c), along with a single dish (013). The ware was common during the 1720s–40s.

#### Staffordshire-type slipware: buff-bodied

This buff-bodied slipware (STSB) was represented by a single, large sherd (weighing 88g) forming almost the complete profile to a dish (029). The dish was wheel-thrown and coated with a cream slip onto which a series of light-brown slip dots were applied to the interior wall of the vessel bordered by two lines of contrasting darker brown slip; a wavy line of dark brown slip adorns the rim flange. The base of the vessel had been knife-trimmed. A late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century date for this vessel is suggested.

#### Staffordshire-type slipware: red-bodied

This red-bodied slipware (STSR) was represented by a single, small body sherd (weighing 2g) probably from a dish (032). The interior of the vessel was decorated with a trailed wavy line of cream slip against the contrasting red body of the vessel.

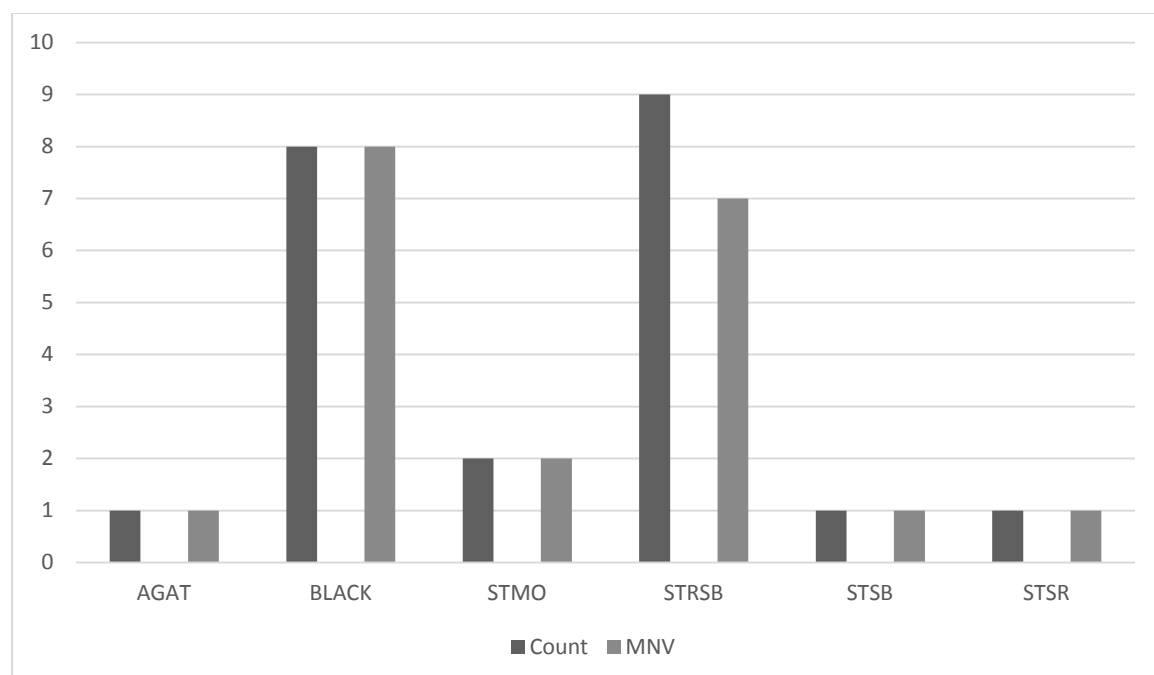


Table 1: Quantification of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century pottery (MNV = Maximum Number of Vessels)

#### *Fabrics and Forms: 19<sup>th</sup> century*

##### Stoneware

Nineteen sherds of stoneware, totalling 933g, were recovered representing a maximum of six vessels. The vessel forms were limited to preserve jars (030) of straight-sided form, one of which was ribbed.

One of the preserve jars carries a transfer-printed label for 'James Keillers Marmalade, Dundee'. The brand was founded in 1797 but the (incomplete) label carries the 'Grand Medal of Merit Vienna' slogan which dates this particular jar to post 1873.

In addition to the preserve jars a single stoneware beverage bottle (033) was recovered. This bottle was stamped into the shoulder 'T. BAYLEY/CONGLETON'. The name is likely to refer to the manufacturer or distributor of the contents of the bottle; unusually the pottery manufacturer had not mark the bottle.

Other 19<sup>th</sup> century wares

In addition to the stoneware vessels, fragments from two decorative pottery vessels were recovered. These comprised a pedestal base from a vase or similar vessel manufactured from a buff-coloured clay and coated with a shiny black glaze (027b), and a body sherd from a mould-decorated vase or jar coated with a blue-green glaze (015).

### **Clay Tobacco Pipe**

A total of 18 fragments of clay tobacco pipe, weighing 47g, comprising one bowl and 17 stems were recovered.

The stem fragments comprise small lengths of various bore diameters suggesting a mixed 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century date range. One fragment of stem – measuring 35mm in length – had been modified by trimming and smoothing both ends, probably for re-use as a hair-curler (016). The bore measurement of 6/64" for this particular fragment would suggest a date in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The single bowl recovered (002) was a spur bowl of squat, bulbous form with rather haphazard burnishing to the surface and a poorly finished mould seam. There are no traces of milling but the greater percentage of the rim is, however, missing. The form is comparable to Atkinson's Broseley Type 4 dating to c. 1690–1720 (Atkinson 1975, 25); the bore measurement is 5/64".

### **Medieval Ceramic Floor Tiles**

Fragments from five medieval floor tiles (012/017/019/025/034), with a combined weight of 683g, were recovered during the watching brief.

The tiles range in thickness from 15mm up to 27mm with the largest fragment measuring 75mm x 120mm; the sides of all but the thickest tile were bevelled. All were in sandy orange to red fabrics and glaze, varying from brown to brown-green, was present on either the edges or underside of the tile, or in some cases both. Decoration to the surface of the tiles, other than a small patch of glaze in one instance, was not recorded and it was clear that the surface of each fragment had been worn away.

Lime-based mortar was noted adhering to the underside and edges of two fragments of tile and this, along with the wear to the surface of the tiles, suggests that they were discarded when worn or broken.

It is unfortunate that the absence of any surviving decorative pattern to the surface of the tiles prevents anything but a broad 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century date being suggested for this assemblage.

### **Post-Medieval Vessel Glass**

Two fragments of post-medieval vessel glass were recovered (006). The first fragment (27g) is from the base of a phial or small cylindrical bottle with a high pushed-in base and rough pontil scar, in a

clear green glass; this vessel is of probable late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century date. The second fragment (20g) is from the wall of a possible mallet-shaped bottle of early to mid 18<sup>th</sup> century date.

### **Carved Stone**

A single stone measuring 0.3m in length, 0.3m in width, and 0.2m in height and of a dressed gritty grey sandstone was recovered from a set of steps (1008). The stone was incised upon one face with a horizontal line at the base and four zigzag lines. The stone type is identical to the wheel-cross stone housed within the current church boiler room, and the incised zigzag tegulation is of a type seen on medieval stone carvings. The dating of medieval stone sculpture is however often dictated by historical context and stylistic analysis, with the latter often relying upon inscriptions or associations (Cramp, R. 1984). The carved stone provides neither of these and the stone itself had been reused thus removing it from its historical context. However, it is worth mentioning that the boiler room wheel-cross stone is currently broken and missing its lower half and it is entirely possible that this stone originally formed the base of the cross stone, although it is slightly larger in dimensions.



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## 8.0 Results of the archaeological watching brief

## 8.0 RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief observed the dismantling of approximately 18.0m length of churchyard wall and the cutting back of the churchyard bank to enable space for the realignment of the wall and the construction of the new disabled access ramp. Numbers shown in brackets refer to assigned context numbers, the details of which are provided in appendix I. The location and orientation of photographs are shown on figure 2.

### **Demolition of churchyard wall and excavation of the churchyard bank (figure 3)**

#### *Description*

The watching brief area consisted of approximately 18.0m length of churchyard wall located 7.0m southwest of St. Mary's Church. In total, nine visits were made between 27<sup>th</sup> August and 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013 to observe the dismantling of the churchyard wall, as well as the excavation of the churchyard bank.

The churchyard wall (1002) stood on average 2.25m in height and was constructed from seven courses of dry-bonded dressed York sandstone blocks (plate 1). For the initial 7.5m from southeast to northwest the wall was dismantled down to its primary course, which was left in-situ to provide the base for reconstruction along the same alignment. After this, the wall was dismantled down to four courses for the remaining 10.5m. The dismantling of the wall showed that the stone blocks varied in dimensions from 0.4m in length, 0.3m in width, and 0.12m in depth through to 0.8m in length, 0.3m in width, and 0.25m in depth. The wall was primarily of a single-skin construction, however a second-skin of undressed sandstone blocks (1010) was observed at the far north-western end (plate 2). These consisted of roughly rectangular stones measuring on average 0.5m in length, 0.3m in width, and 0.3m in depth, bonded to the inside of the churchyard wall (1002) by a light gritty mortar.

The churchyard bank was excavated back towards the church to allow space for the reconstruction of the new churchyard wall and the disabled access ramp. The excavation of the bank was carried out using a mini-excavator with toothless ditching bucket. The intention was to excavate the bank by 1.0m width along the 18.0m length of wall; however this was more often than not dictated by the presence of known and formerly unknown burials/cremations.

The topsoil horizon (1007) consisted of a soft dark black-brown sand-silt layer measuring approximately 0.3m in depth. This overlaid a subsoil deposit (1006) of soft mid to dark grey-brown sand-silt of approximately 1.0m depth. This deposit was highly disturbed, almost certainly through the construction of the churchyard wall but also through centuries of human interment. The subsoil horizon produced the majority of recovered artefacts which included 109 disarticulated human bones, medieval tile fragments, glass, clay pipe, and ceramic sherds dating from the 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries (see section 7.0).

As the churchyard bank (1006 and 1007) was cut back a wall consisting of large yellow, undressed, sub-angular sandstone blocks (1003) was revealed which lay to the immediate north of the churchyard wall (1002) and followed the same alignment (plates 3 and 4). This wall was dry-bonded and of a single-skin construction to a maximum of two courses and a maximum of 0.4m in height and 0.5m in width. It was butted by the churchyard wall (1002), thus predating it, and was almost certainly an earlier version of the boundary wall (figure 4). The structure continued sporadically for approximately 8.85m and then was no longer visible, although this may have been because the churchyard wall (1002) was being retained at four of its original courses after this point and thus the excavation of the bank was not to a sufficient depth to reveal further remains.

Approximately 2.0m northwest of the south-eastern limit of excavation a known red-brick burial vault (1001) was carefully exposed (plate 5) after demolition of the churchyard wall (1002). The vault was constructed from unfrosted red-brick bonded by lime mortar and measured 1.4m in height by 2.5m in

length. The vault was overlain by a tombstone which although badly weathered had the date 1889 visible as well as the family name *Lowndes Moir*. The vault butted up against the earlier churchyard wall (1003) but clearly post-dated it and had been inserted against the inside of the wall through the excavation of a grave cut [1004]. This cut had almost vertical sides and had been cut through the topsoil (1007) and subsoil (1006) horizons, and backfilled with a soft mid red-brown sand-silt (1005).

Approximately 6.0m northwest of vault (1001) a second red-brick vault (1009) was revealed (plate 6). This burial vault was of a similar construction to vault (1001) being made from unfrogged red-brick bonded by a lime mortar and sealed by rectangular stone slabs, but was smaller in dimensions measuring 1.5m in length and 0.5m in height, although not all of the vault was exposed. Unlike the previous vault this burial did not have any grave marker and the church records did not record a burial vault at this location. As such the exact age of the vault is unknown, although the construction and materials indicate a late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century origin and the tomb almost certainly belonged to the *Lowndes Moir* family.

Approximately 1.0m northwest of the burial vault (1009) a set of four stones were discovered which most likely represent three stone steps (1008) (plates 7 and 8). The lower step comprised two rectangular stones measuring approximately 0.3m in length, 0.3m in width, and 0.2m in height, with two larger rectangular stones set above and forming the three steps. The lowest two stones were bonded by a sandy mortar and it is possible that the steps originally led through the earlier churchyard wall (1003), indicating an entrance at this point. Furthermore, the north-westernmost lowest stone (plates 9 and 10) had clearly been reused as it was incised with a horizontal line at the base and four zigzag lines above it (plates 11 and 12) on its outward face (Small find no. 023). The carved stone was of a dressed gritty grey sandstone that matched the medieval wheel-cross stone held within the boiler room of the church, and it is very likely that this stone represents a broken medieval stone carving, possibly a burial slab.

At the north-western end of the area to be monitored by the watching brief, an east-west aligned 19<sup>th</sup> century red-brick vaulted chamber (1011) was revealed by the works (plate 11). This chamber was already known about and had formerly held the boiler for the Church's central heating system. The vaulted chamber had been capped with concrete and had clearly been specifically constructed to house the furnace and boiler in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was also apparent that the chamber had been inserted through the churchyard wall (1002) thus post-dating its construction.

### *Discussion*

The watching brief maintained during the demolition of the churchyard wall and during the excavation of the church bank revealed that the area had been highly disturbed, both through the construction of at least two churchyard walls (1002 and 1003) as well as during centuries of human burial. There was no dating evidence recovered from the earlier churchyard wall (1003) or from the stone steps (1008), and no contextual evidence to form a relationship between the two features. However it is possible that these two features were contemporary in date and that the set of steps formed an entrance through the churchyard wall which has since gone out of use. The later churchyard wall (1002) also did not produce any artefactual evidence, however the use of large dressed York sandstone blocks suggests that it dates to around the 18<sup>th</sup> century and thus the earlier wall (1003) and steps (1008) predate this and may be of medieval origin. Indeed, artefactual evidence of the medieval period was recovered in the form of glazed medieval tile from the subsoil horizon (1006) along the length of the works, suggesting a now demolished building of this era stood close by.

The carved stone (small find no. 023) that had been reused within the stone steps (1008) is very likely to be of medieval origin. The stone type is identical to the wheel-cross stone housed within the current church boiler room, and the incised zigzag tegulation is of a type seen on medieval stone carvings. The dating of medieval stone sculpture is however often dictated by historical context and stylistic analysis, with the latter often relying upon inscriptions or associations (Cramp, R. 1984). The carved

stone provides neither of these and the stone itself had been reused thus removing it from its historical context. However, the boiler room wheel-cross stone is currently broken and missing its lower half and it is entirely possible that this stone originally formed the base of the cross stone, although it is slightly larger in dimensions.

The two red-brick burial vaults (1001 and 1009) almost certainly date to the late Victorian period and belong to the *Lowndes Moir* family. The English name of Lowndes is one of ancient origin and honourable record in England, and equally distinguished in the annals of American statesmanship and in social life. William Lowndes, of Bury Chesham, made during his lifetime much research relating to the several branches of the family. According to the pedigree of the Winslow branch, the first of the Lowndes name in England and the common ancestor of all of the Lowndes family lines, was William Seigneur de Lounde, who accompanied William the Conqueror into Great Britain in 1066, and acquired large possessions in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, and Bedfordshire. Middlewich and Sandbach, adjoining parishes in Cheshire, were early settled by the Lowndes family, which had become wealthy in the seventeenth century owing to success in opening salt mines upon their estates. From these mines, worked for several centuries, an enormous amount of salt was sent out, both for home consumption and foreign shipment.

William Lowndes of Westminster and Winslow, born at Winslow on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1652 and died 1722, was the most distinguished man who bore the Lowndes name in England. He was a member for many years of the House of Commons, and served as chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means. He originated the funded system and rose to great power and influence in Parliament. In recognition of his service, Queen Anne conferred upon him the office of Auditor of the Land Revenue for life, in reversion to his sons with an augmentation to his coat of arms. Mr. William Lowndes was known through the length and breadth of Great Britain as "Ways and Means Lowndes" ([lowndes.wordpress.com](http://lowndes.wordpress.com)). The traditional seat of the Lowndes family was at Overton House in Congleton, with St. Mary's Church in Astbury being the traditional burial ground for members of the family.

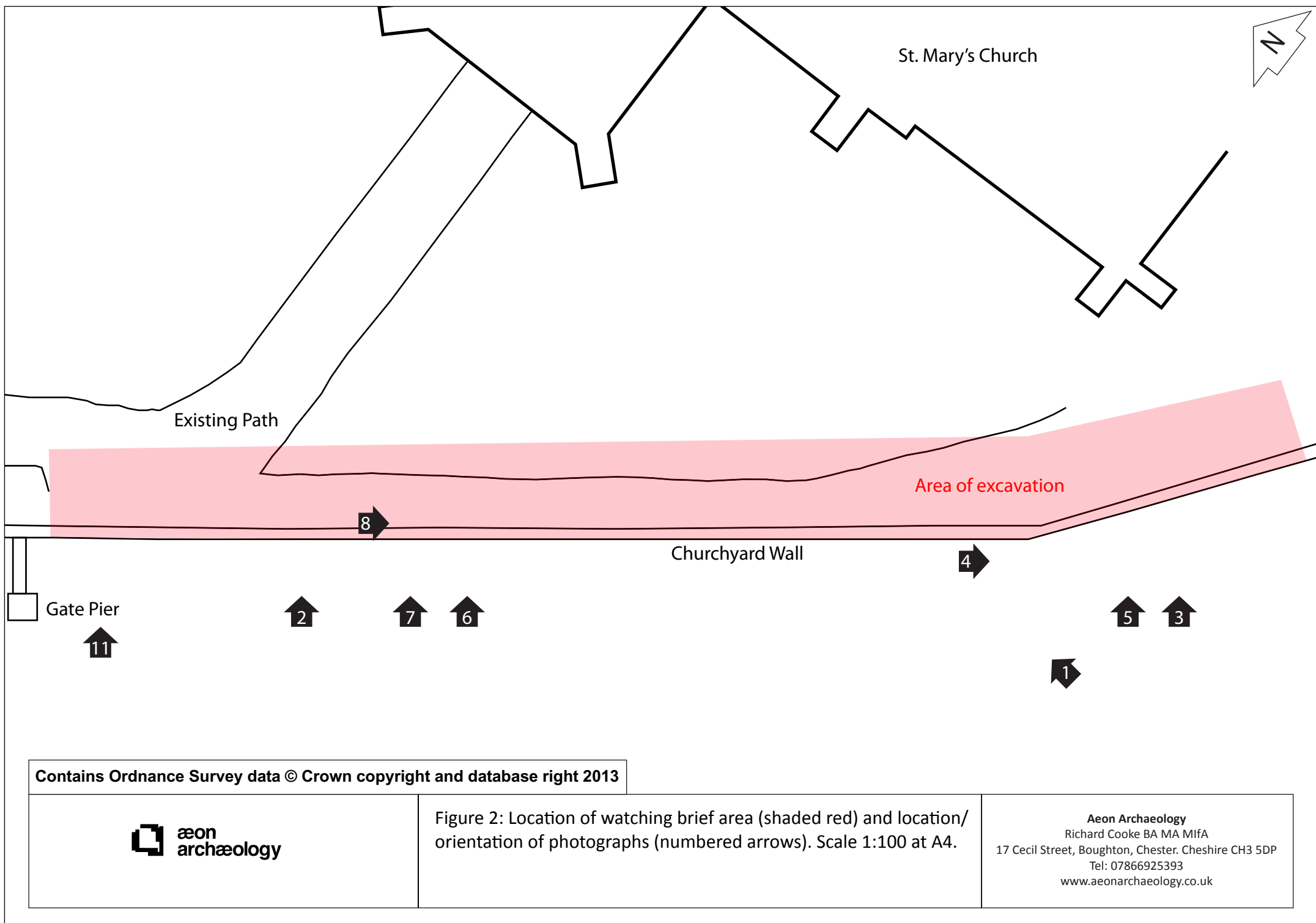


Figure 03: Plan of wall (1003), vault (1009), and steps (1008). Scale 1:50 at A4.

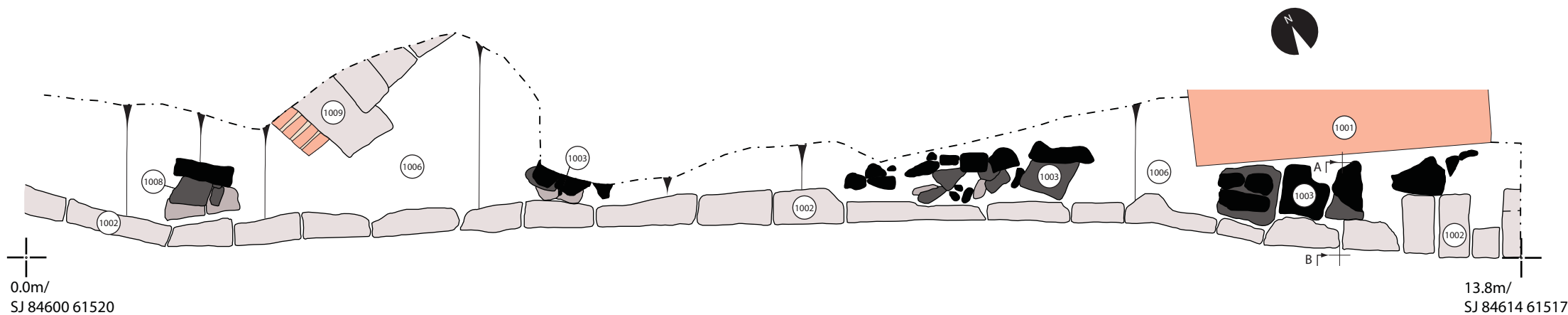
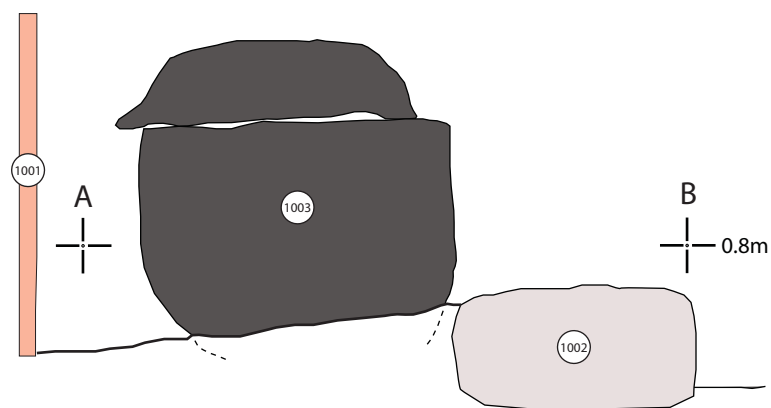


Figure 04: Profile of church yard walls (1002) and (1003). Scale 1:10 at A4. Drawing located on figure 3.





**Plate 01:** Churchyard wall (1002) prior to demolition, from the south. Scale 1.0m.



**Plate 02:** Wall packing stones (1010), from the southwest. Scale 0.2m.



**Plate 03:** Former churchyard wall (1003), from the southwest. Scale 1.0m.



**Plate 04:** Former churchyard wall (1003), from the northwest. Scale 0.5m.



**Plate 05:** Burial vault (1001), from the southwest. Scale 1.0m.



**Plate 06:** Burial vault (1009), from the southwest. Scale 0.5m.



**Plate 07:** Stone steps (1008) with carved stone (small find: 023), from the southwest. Scale 0.5m.



**Plate 08:** Stone steps (1008) with carved stone (small find: 023), from the northwest. Scale 0.5m.



**Plate 09:** Carved stone (small find: 023). Scale 0.5m.



**Plate 10:** Carved stone (small find: 023) (incised carving highlighted in white). Scale 0.5m.



**Plate 11:** Boiler vault (1011), from the southwest. Scale 1.0m.



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## 9.0 Conclusion

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

The watching brief maintained during the demolition of the churchyard wall and excavation of the church bank at St. Mary's, Astbury revealed the presence of an earlier version of the churchyard wall, constructed from single-skin dry-stone yellow sandstone. This wall was situated to the immediate north of the existing churchyard wall and despite not producing any artefactual evidence, was proved to be contextually earlier than the existing wall. Moreover, a set of four stones forming three steps were discovered which almost certainly refer to an earlier access through the churchyard wall which has since gone out of use. These steps could not be proven to be stratigraphically associated with the earlier churchyard wall; however it is likely that the two features were contemporary.

In addition, the lowest stone of the three steps had been reused and had an incised carving of a single horizontal line beneath four zigzags. The stone type was of a grey sandstone and identical to that of the medieval wheel-cross stone housed in the church boiler room. Furthermore, the zigzag tegulation is of a type seen on medieval stone carvings, and there is a possibility that the stone originally formed part of the base of the wheel-cross stone.

The watching brief also observed and recorded two red-brick burial vaults of the late Victorian era and belonging to the Lowndes Moir family.

The finds assemblage from St. Mary's church, Astbury, reflects activity within the grounds of the church during the post-medieval period. The pottery forms recorded were biased towards the consumption of beverages, supplemented by tobacco. These trends perhaps reflect the needs of workers employed during work and repair to the church building and grounds, including those employed in the digging of graves. The dating of the pottery, clay tobacco pipe and glass suggests, it would seem that there was a particular flurry of activity within the grounds of the church during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, almost certainly associated with the construction of the current churchyard boundary wall.

The archaeological watching brief has succeeded in determining a stratigraphical sequence to this part of the churchyard of St. Mary's and has also proven the high probability for discovery of artefacts and archaeological remains.



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## 10.0 Sources

## 10.0 SOURCES

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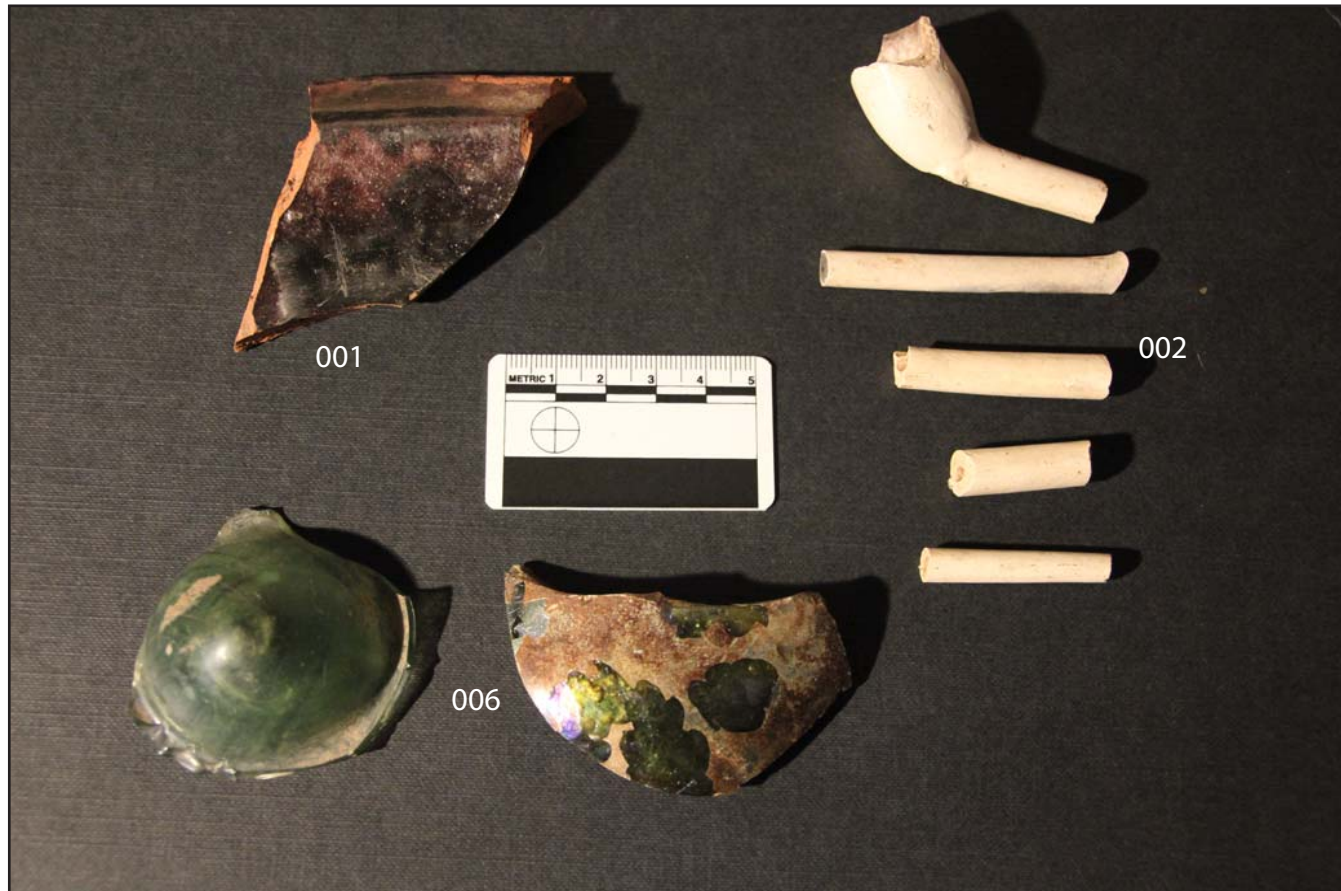
## APPENDIX I – DETAILS OF RECORDED CONTEXTS

Context No	Form	Description	Artefacts
1001	19 <sup>th</sup> Century red-brick burial vault	Red brick burial vault belonging to the Lowndes Moir family and dated 1889. Constructed from unfrogged red-brick measuring 9inch x 4inch x 3inch, bonded by lime mortar and measuring 1.4m in height x 2.5m in length. Lies within grave cut [1004].	None
1002	18 <sup>th</sup> Century churchyard wall	Existing churchyard wall. Single-skin of 7 courses with coping stones. Constructed from light-grey dressed York sandstone blocks measuring an average of 0.8m long x 0.3m wide x 0.25m deep.	None
1003	Former churchyard wall (medieval?)	Former churchyard wall constructed from undressed sub-angular blocks of large yellow sandstone. Dry-bonded and single-skin to max of 2 courses. Measures 0.4m in height, 0.5m in width, and 8.85m in length. Butted by wall (1002).	None
1004	Burial cut for (1001)	Cut for burial vault (1001). Vertical sides, base not visible, cut through topsoil (1007) and subsoil (1006). Backfilled with (1005). Measures 1.4m in depth x 2.8m in length.	None
1005	Backfill of burial cut [1004]	Backfill of burial cut [1004] for vault (1001). Soft, mid red-brown sand-silt with infrequent small stone inclusions. Measures 1.4m in depth and 0.15m in width.	None
1006	Subsoil horizon	Soft, mid/dark grey-brown sand-silt measuring 1.0m in depth. Highly disturbed by construction of wall (1002) and burials.	S.F. 1-22, 24-34
1007	Topsoil horizon	Soft, dark black-brown sand-silt with infrequent small stone inclusions. Measures 0.3m in depth.	None
1008	Former stone steps (medieval?)	Four sandstone blocks forming three steps, possibly as a former access through the churchyard wall (1003). Measures 0.9m in length x 0.6m in width x 0.3m in height. One of the lowest stones was reused from elsewhere and carved.	S.F. 23
1009	19 <sup>th</sup> Century red-brick burial vault	Red brick burial vault probably belonging to the Lowndes Moir family. Constructed from unfrogged red-brick measuring 9inch x 4inch x 3inch, bonded by lime mortar and measuring >1.5m in length x >0.5m in height, partially exposed.	None
1010	Packing stones of churchyard wall (1002)	Undressed sub-angular sandstone blocks on average 0.5m long x 0.3m wide x 0.3m deep, used as packing material to wall (1002).	None
1011	19 <sup>th</sup> Century boiler vault	East-west aligned red-brick vaulted chamber constructed to accommodate the church boiler. Has been inserted through wall (1002) and capped with concrete.	None

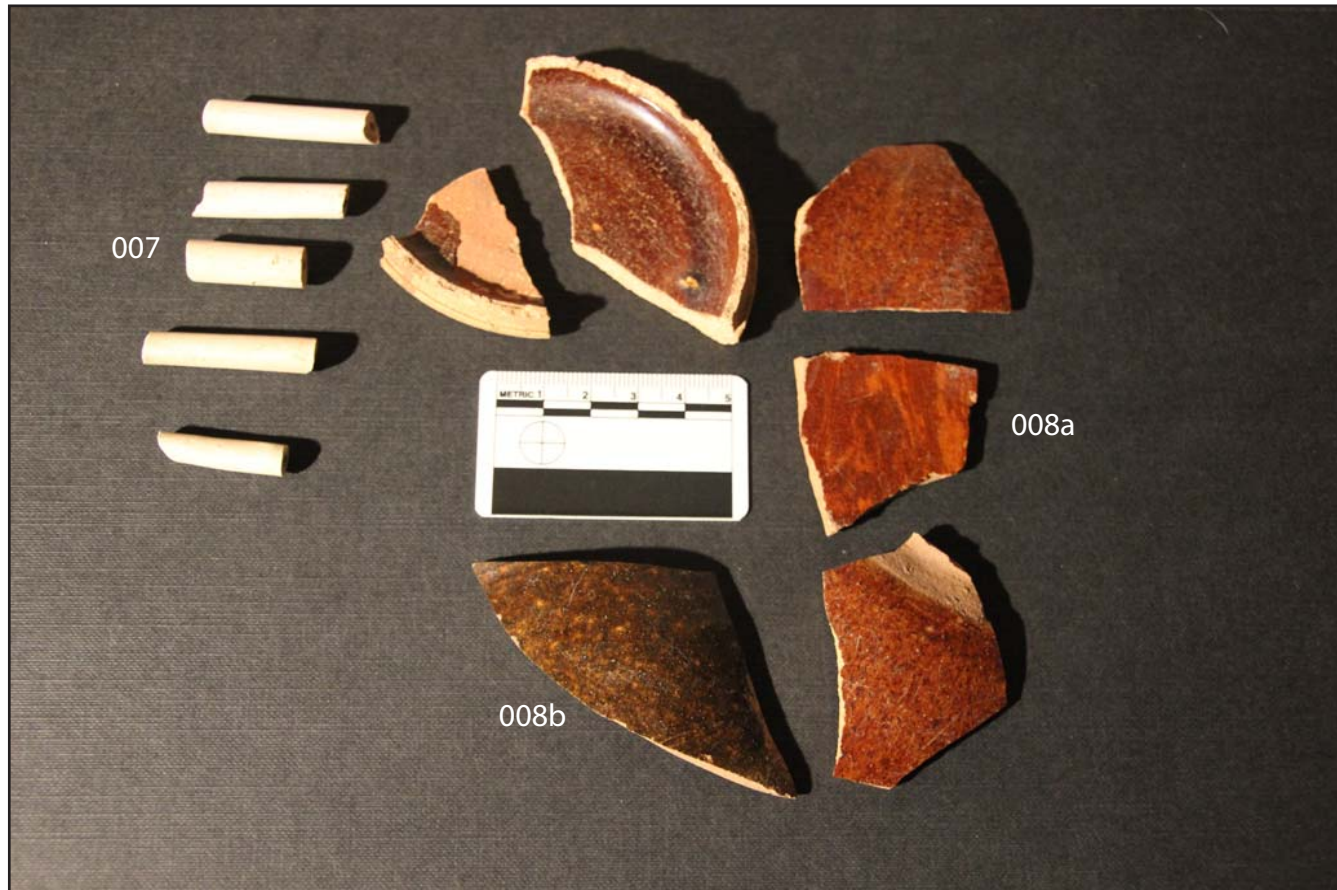
## APPENDIX II – GAZETTEER OF ARTEFACTS

Finds no.	Context	Description	Photograph
1	1006	1 x sherd of black ware ceramic from SJ 84606 61510	I
2	1006	5 x fragments of clay pipe from SJ 84606 61510	I
3	1006	17 x fragments of disarticulated human bone from SJ 84606 61510	n.a.
4	1006	2 x modern cremations from SJ 84605 61514	n.a.
5	1006	9 x fragments of disarticulated human bone from SJ 84605 61514	n.a.
6	1006	2 x sherds of white/green glass from SJ 84605 61514	I
7	1006	5 x fragments of clay pipe from SJ 84605 61514	II
8a	1006	5 x sherds of Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware ceramic from SJ 84605 61514	II
8b	1006	1 x sherd of 18 <sup>th</sup> Century agate ware from SJ 84605 61514	II
9	1006	22 x fragments of disarticulated human bone from SJ 84605 61508	n.a.
10	1006	10 x fragments of disarticulated human bone from SJ 84595 61515	n.a.
11	1006	2 x sherd of black ware ceramic from SJ 84595 61515	III
12	1006	1 x fragment of medieval tile from SJ 84595 61515	III
13	1006	1 x sherd of Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware ceramic from SJ 84602 61514	III
14	1006	1 x sherd of black ware ceramic from SJ 84602 61514	IV
15	1006	1 x 19 <sup>th</sup> century green glazed ware from SJ 84602 61514	IV
16	1006	3 x fragments of clay pipe from SJ 84602 61514	IV
17	1006	1 x fragment of medieval tile from SJ 84602 61514	IV
18	1006	27 x fragments of disarticulated human bone from SJ 84588 61506	V
19	1006	1 x fragment of medieval tile from SJ 84588 61506	VI
20a	1006	1 x sherd of black ware ceramic from SJ 84588 61506	VI
20b	1006	1 x sherd of Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware ceramic from SJ 84588 61506	VI
21	1006	1 x Staffordshire type mottled ware from SJ 84588 61506	VI
22	1006	2 x fragments of clay pipe from SJ 84588 61506	VI
23	1008	1 x medieval carved stone from SJ 84602 61520	09, 10
24	1006	3 x fragments of clay pipe from SJ 84599 61521	VII
25	1006	1 x fragment of medieval tile from SJ 84599 61521	VII
26	1006	1 x cow/horse molar from SJ 84599 61521	VII
27a	1006	4 x sherd of black ware ceramic from SJ 84599 61521	VII
27b	1006	21 x 19 <sup>th</sup> century black glazed ware from SJ 84599 61521	VII
27c	1006	1 x sherd of Staffordshire-type red-slipped buffware ceramic from SJ 84599 61521	VII
28	1006	1 x sherd Staffordshire type mottled ware ceramic from SJ 84599 61521	VIII
29	1006	1 x sherd Staffordshire-type slipware: buff-bodied ceramic from SJ 84599 61521	VIII
30	1006	18 x sherd of stoneware ceramic from SJ 84590 61535	IX
31	1006	24 x fragments of disarticulated human bone from SJ 84594 61528	n.a.
32	1006	1 x sherd of Staffordshire-type slipware: red-bodied from SJ 84590 61535	VIII
33	1006	1 x post-medieval stoneware ceramic bottle from SJ 84591	VIII

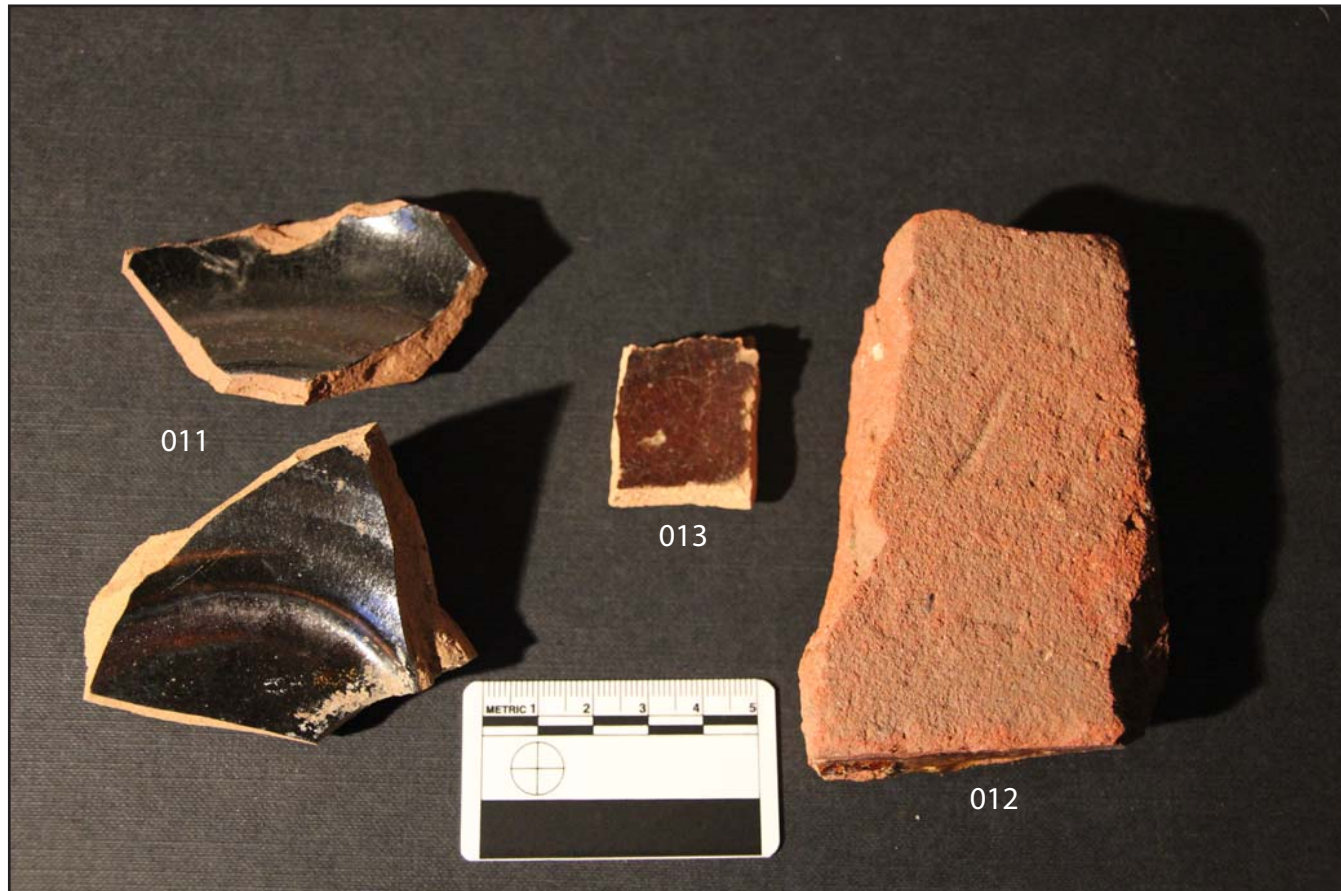
		61534	
34	1006	1 x fragment of medieval tile from SJ 84588 61537	VIII



**Plate I:** Recovered artefacts small finds 001, 002, and 006. Scale 5.0cm.



**Plate II:** Recovered artefacts small finds 007 and 008. Scale 5.0cm.



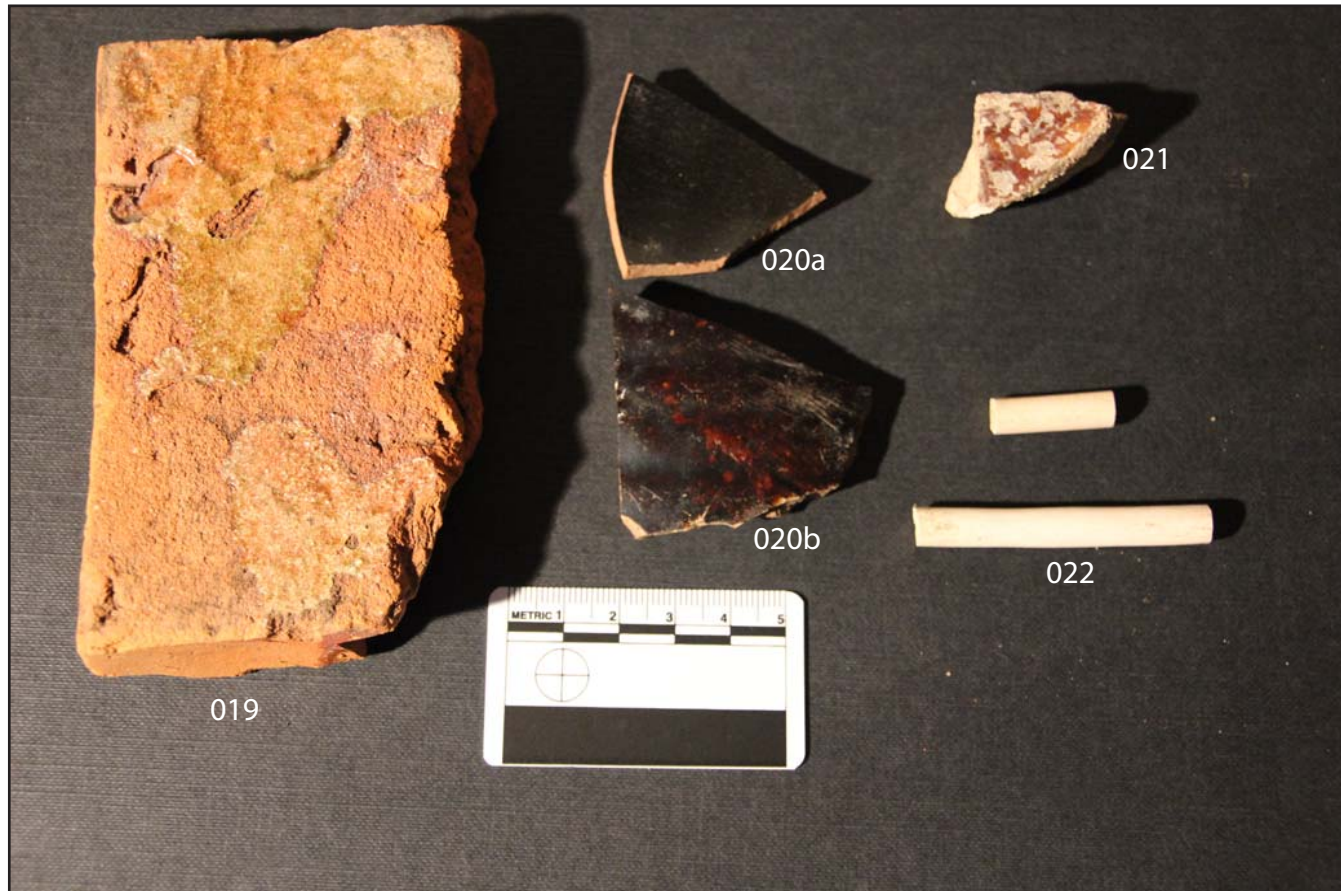
**Plate III:** Recovered artefacts small finds 011, 012, and 013. Scale 5.0cm.



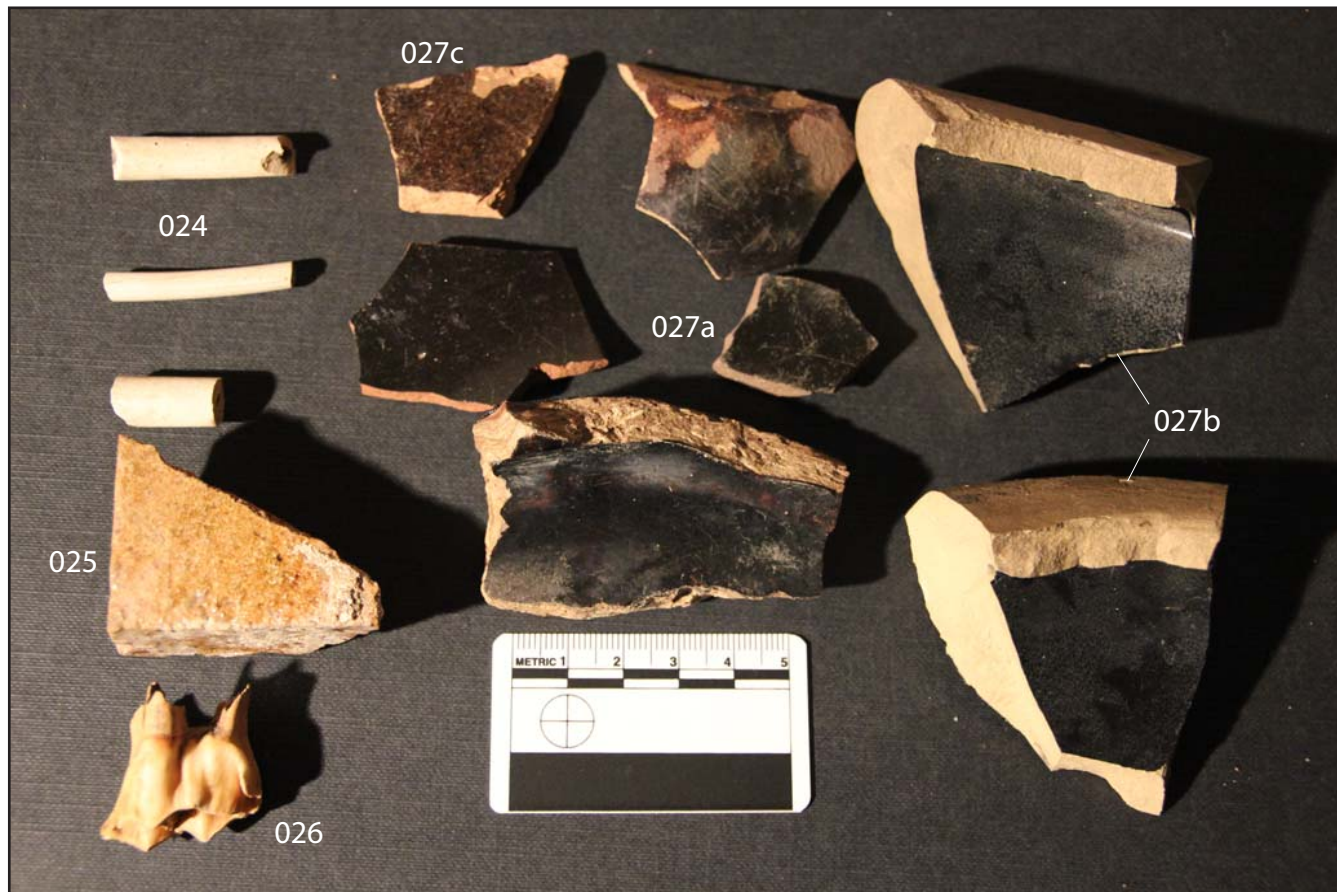
**Plate IV:** Recovered artefacts small finds 014, 015, 016, and 017. Scale 5.0cm.



**Plate V:** Recovered disarticulated human bone small find 018. Scale 0.5m.



**Plate VI:** Recovered artefacts small finds 019, 020, 021, and 022. Scale 5.0cm.



**Plate VII:** Recovered artefacts small finds 024, 025, 026, and 027. Scale 5.0cm.



**Plate VIII:** Recovered artefacts small finds 028, 029, 032, 033, and 034. Scale 5.0cm.



Plate IX: Recovered artefacts small finds 030. Scale 5.0cm.

## **APPENDIX III – PROJECT DESIGN FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

# **PROJECT DESIGN FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**TENDER PROJECT CODE:** T0022

**SITE:** St. Marys Church, Astbury, Cheshire

**NGR:** SJ 84621 61526

**PLANNING REF:** 11/3930C

**DATE:** 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013

**PREPARED FOR:** Graham Holland Associates

1. INTRODUCTION .....	3
2. STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS .....	3
3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND .....	3
4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AIMS .....	3
5. PROGRAMME OF WORK .....	4
5.1 <i>Archaeological Watching Brief</i> .....	4
6.0 FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS .....	4
7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES .....	5
8.0 HUMAN REMAINS .....	5
9.0 SMALL FINDS .....	5
10.0 REPORT PRODUCTION .....	5
11. ARCHIVING .....	6
7. PERSONNEL .....	6
8. MONITORING .....	6
9. HEALTH AND SAFETY .....	6
10. INSURANCE .....	6
11. SOURCES CONSULTED .....	6

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Aeon Archaeology has been asked by Graham Holland Associates to provide a cost and project design for carrying out an archaeological watching brief as a condition of a planning application (ref: **11/3930C**) during the demolition of part of the churchyard wall for the installation of a disabled access ramp at St. Mary's Church, Astbury, Cheshire (NGR **SJ 84621 61526**).

A mitigation brief has not been prepared for this work by the **Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service**, but the development control archaeologist (Mark Leah) has recommended that

*'no development shall take place within the area until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority'* (Mark Leah email correspondence dated 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011).

It is recommended that the content of this design be approved by the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service prior to the commencement of works.

Reference will be made to the guidelines specified in Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (Institute for Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001 and 2008).

## 2. STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

- The church of St. Mary is a grade I Listed Building (ref: 1138740).
- The Scheduled Ancient Monument of *Standing Cross in St. Mary's Churchyard* is located within the churchyard.
- The Scheduled Ancient Monument of *Canopied tomb in St Mary's Churchyard* is located within the churchyard.

## 3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Astbury Parish Church was once the centre of an extensive medieval parish and the current church contains much 14<sup>th</sup> century work, with evidence of earlier phases. The presence of a Saxon Cross fragment demonstrates the site's importance in the pre-conquest period. The extensive graveyard has been in use for many centuries as evidenced by the medieval tombs to the north of the church, which are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

## 4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AIMS

The **watching brief** will consist of the following:

- Observation of the demolition of the stretch of graveyard wall.
- Observation of the cutting back of the graveyard ground level to facilitate the construction of the new access ramp.
- A written and photographic record of any archaeological features, including inhumations and structures that may be revealed by the work.

- Preparation of a full archive report.

**If archaeological/ human remains are encountered during the watching brief it may be necessary to suspend development work in that area. The client should have a suitable contingency in place in case of such a scenario.**

## 5. PROGRAMME OF WORK

### 5.1 Archaeological Watching Brief

(Reproduced from IFA. 2001. *Institute for Archaeologists 1994 rev. 2001 and 2008 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*)

The definition of an archaeological watching brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive.

This definition and *Standard* do not cover chance observations, which should lead to an appropriate archaeological project being designed and implemented, nor do they apply to monitoring for preservation of remains *in situ*.

An archaeological watching brief is divided into four categories according to the IFA. 2001. *Institute for Archaeologists 2001 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*:

- comprehensive (present during all ground disturbance)
- intensive (present during sensitive ground disturbance)
- intermittent (viewing the trenches after machining)
- partial (as and when seems appropriate).

An **intensive** watching brief is to be maintained during demolition and sensitive ground disturbance.

A photographic record will be maintained throughout, using a digital SLR camera (Canon 550D) set to maximum resolution and any subsurface remains will be recorded photographically, with detailed notations and a measured survey using a handheld GPS (Satmap Active 10). The archive produced will be held at Aeon Archaeology under the project code (Tbc).

## 6.0 FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS

- The discovery of substantial buried archaeological remains during the watching brief may result in the requirement for a wider programme of archaeological mitigation. This may require the submission of revised quotes to the client.
- This design does not include a methodology or cost for examination, conservation and archiving of finds discovered during the watching brief, nor of any radiocarbon dates required, nor of examination of palaeoenvironmental samples. The need for these will be identified in the post-fieldwork programme (if required), and a new design will be issued for approval by the Development Control Archaeologist.

## **7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES**

If necessary, relevant archaeological deposits will be sampled by taking bulk samples (a minimum of 10.0 litres and maximum of 30.0 litres) for flotation of charred plant remains. Bulk samples will be taken from waterlogged deposits for macroscopic plant remains, small bones, and small artefacts.

## **8.0 HUMAN REMAINS**

All human remains encountered will have a photographic and descriptive record taken prior to lifting. The location of remains will be surveyed using a handheld GPS (Satmap Active 10), and remains will be handed over immediately to the church warden of St. Mary's Church for reburial in the graveyard. If human remains are found to continue outside of the excavation area the revealed remains will be recorded and lifted, as above, but will not be pursued beyond the edge of excavation.

## **9.0 SMALL FINDS**

All finds are the property of the landowner (St. Mary's Church) but it is recommended that finds are donated to an appropriate museum for conservation and research. Furthermore, the client agrees to granting access to all finds recovered by Aeon Archaeology for analysis, study and publication as necessary.

Initial identification of artefacts will be carried out by Aeon Archaeology, but additional conservation and analysis will be undertaken by a suitably qualified specialist, if required.

The cost for examination, conservation and archiving of finds discovered during the watching brief are not included within this quote.

If well preserved materials are found it may be necessary to employ additional staff. Furthermore, it may be necessary to suspend work within a specific region of the site, or across the whole site, while conservation and excavation/recording takes place. Aeon Archaeology accepts no responsibility for any costs incurred from delays as a result of unexpected archaeological finds.

The cost for the additional staff, resources, and time required to excavate/ record unexpected archaeological finds/ features are not included within this quote and a separate project design and costs will be submitted to the client if necessary.

## **10.0 REPORT PRODUCTION**

Following completion of the watching brief as outlined above, a report will be produced incorporating the following:

- Non-technical summary
- Introduction
- Project Design
- Methodology
- Archaeological Background
- Description of the results of the watching brief
- Summary and conclusions
- Bibliography of sources consulted.

Illustrations will include plans of the location of the study area and archaeological sites. Historical maps, when appropriate and if copyright permissions allow, will be included. Photographs of relevant sites and of the study area where appropriate will be included.

A draft copy of the report will be sent to the regional curatorial archaeologist and to the client prior to production of the final report.

## **11. ARCHIVING**

A full archive including plans, photographs, written material and any other material resulting from the project will be prepared. All plans, photographs and descriptions will be labelled, and cross-referenced, and lodged in an appropriate place within six months of the completion of the project. The location is to be agreed with the Curatorial Archaeologist.

Bound copies of the report and an archive CD will be sent to the regional HER (HER, The Forum, Chester, Cheshire, CH1 2HS).

## **7. PERSONNEL**

The work will be managed and undertaken by Richard Cooke, Archaeological Contractor and Consultant at Aeon Archaeology.

## **8. MONITORING**

Monitoring visits can be arranged during the course of the project with the clients and with the appropriate Development Control archaeologist.

## **9. HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Aeon Archaeology has a Health and Safety Policy Statement which can be supplied upon request. Furthermore, site-specific Risk Assessments and Method Statements are compiled and distributed to every member of staff involved with the project prior to the commencement of works.

## **10. INSURANCE**

*Liability Insurance – Towergate Insurance Policy 000467*

- Employers' Liability: Limit of Indemnity £10m in any one occurrence
- Public Liability: Limit of Indemnity £2m in any one occurrence
- Legal Defence Costs (Health and Safety at Work Act): £250,000

The current period expires 30/09/13

*Professional Indemnity Insurance – Towergate Insurance Policy 2011025521290*

- Limit of Indemnity £500,000 any one claim

The current period expires 30/09/13

## **11. SOURCES CONSULTED**

Mark Leah email correspondence dated 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011.

Reproduction of Client Drawing **511/02**

Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (Institute for Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001 and 2008).

## COST ESTIMATE

1. Intensive watching brief during churchyard wall demolition and 'cut back'.	9 days	
2. Report, illustration and archiving	4 days	

**By commissioning Aeon Archaeology to undertake this work the client agrees to be invoiced directly at the end of each calendar month for works to date or once the project concludes, whichever occurs first. In addition, the client agrees to pay the invoice no more than 1 calendar month after issue from Aeon Archaeology.**

