

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
MAINTAINED ON WORKS AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
CHURCH HILL, RINGMER, EAST SUSSEX.**

N. G. R. TQ 44575 12505

Project Number 08 / 08

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ABSTRACT.

An archaeological watching brief was maintained on the lifting of a brick paved floor and associated stone slab located within the open south porch of St. Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer, East Sussex.

No previously unrecorded cut features or structures were discovered during the fieldwork. However, a mid 18th – 19th century date has been confirmed for the bricks used in the construction of the floor. The collated evidence would also suggest that the stone slab was installed or re-laid during the late 19th century replacement of the church's main south door.

1.0. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. This document presents the results of an archaeological watching brief maintained on works undertaken within the open timber – framed south porch of St. Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer, East Sussex (N. G. R. TQ 44575 12505) (figures 1, 2 and 3).

1.2. The archaeological watching brief followed the advice given by the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC) namely that:

No development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) submitted to and approved by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and all works shall be carried - out in accordance with the WSI.

1.3. C. G. Archaeology was commissioned by Peter Pritchett of John D. Clarke and Partners to conduct an archaeological watching brief on the works listed below.

- the lifting of a brick paved floor and associated stone slab located within the open south porch of the church.
- The reduction of the underlying deposits to a maximum depth below the original floor base of c.0.11m.
- The reinstatement of the brick paved floor and stone slab at the new reduced level.

1.4. The archaeological methodology employed during the project (see Section 5.0.) was based upon a targeted Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by C. G. Archaeology and agreed with Casper Johnson the East Sussex County

Council Archaeologist and Vivienne Coad the Archaeological Advisor to the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC).

- 1.5. It should be noted that no fresh examination of the East Sussex County Historical Environment Record or available historic cartographic and documentary sources was required as part of the current archaeological investigation. Consequently, the primary aim of this report is to simply document and consider the fieldwork results.
- 1.6. The archaeological fieldwork was carried – out by Christopher Greatorex of C. G. Archaeology between the 4th and 13th August 2008.

2.0. GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.

- 2.1. The 1: 50,000 British Geological Survey (Sheet 319: Lewes) records the 'natural' geology at the church as Gault.

3.0. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

- 3.1. No detailed examination of historic documentary or cartographic evidence was undertaken as part of the project under consideration here. Nevertheless, the following information regarding St. Mary's Church has been extracted from "The buildings of England: Sussex" by Ian Nairn and Nikolaus Pevsner.
- 3.2. 'The flint west tower and west extension of the nave of 1884 – 5. The two sandstone chancel chapels are Perpendicular. So are their two-bay arcades to the chancel (four-centred arches). But the aisle arcades are earlier. They have very tall unmoulded bases and on these there are on the north side 13th century bases. But the piers and arches, like those of the south arcade, are rather 14th century. Heavy original timbers in the south porch. The south chapel probably the one built c.1500, the north chapel the one to which a will of 1535 refers. But the south chapel doorway and south window must be re-used 14th century material. The north chapel has a good Jacobean plaster ceiling with decorated beams'(Nairn and Pevsner 2001, 587).
- 3.3. In February 2007 a short architectural report was prepared on the church's timber – framed south porch (Martin 2007). Neither the brick floor or associated stone slab located inside the porch were described in this paper. Even so, it is worth noting that the early work incorporated within the current front wall 'suggests a probable date for the porch in the second half of the 15th century, or perhaps the very early 16th century. Yet the style of the other constructional details (moulding, thickness of braces etc.) suggests a date in the first half of the 15th century, or perhaps even the late 14th century' (Martin 2007, 3).

4.0. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

4.1. The agreed Written Scheme of Investigation for the project (see Section 1.4.) defined the primary aims of the archaeological watching brief as follows.

- Maintain an archaeological watching brief on the lifting of the brick paved floor and associated stone slab located within the open south porch of the church.
- Maintain an archaeological watching brief on the reduction of the underlying deposits to a maximum depth below the original floor base of c.0.11m.
- Maintain an archaeological watching brief on the reinstatement of the brick paved floor and stone slab at the new reduced level.
- All layers, structural remains, cut features, funerary monuments, human remains, artefacts and ecofacts of archaeological interest exposed and / or affected by the monitored works will be recorded and interpreted to appropriate standards.

5.0. INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY.

- 5.1. Prior to the onset of the building project a full 35mm. black and white film and digital photographic record was made of the *in-situ* brick paved floor and associated stone slab located inside the south porch. A written description and supplementary sketch plan of the porch floor was also prepared. The extant brick surface and stone slab were documented on individual context record sheets
- 5.2. On completion of the work described above, the brick floor and associated stone slab were lifted by staff from the main site contractors (David Johns Associates) under the supervision of C. G. Archaeology.
- 5.3. The deposits revealed as a result of this procedure were then excavated manually and in level spits by the main site contractors to a maximum observed depth below the original floor base of c.0.11m. All such excavation work was carried – out under the supervision of C. G. Archaeology.
- 5.4. Each archaeological context exposed during the fieldwork was investigated manually in order to assess its archaeological / palaeoenvironmental potential and then documented on a context record sheet. Samples of floor brick and other ceramic building materials were retained for post-excavation examination.
- 5.5. Finally, the lifted bricks and associated stone slab were reinstated under archaeological supervision.
- 5.6. A full photographic record of the fieldwork and 'new' floor surface was maintained as appropriate.

6.0. RESULTS OF FIELDWORK.

- 6.1. The porch floor under discussion possessed a maximum length of 3.9m. and width of 2.7m. The undulating nature of the original structure is demonstrated by the relative levels (mm.) shown on Figure 3.
- 6.2. The brick surface **(1)** comprised 24 rows of floor bricks set end – to – end in a north – south aligned ‘half–bond’ pattern. No surviving mortar was observed in the gaps found between the individual pavers. However, the three rows of bricks located nearest to both the east and west porch walls did have significant deposits of a clean – looking mortar adhering to their uppermost (i.e. visible) faces. This latter evidence suggests that these two discrete areas of the floor (sited beneath wooden benches) had been lifted and replaced / reinstated relatively recently. The average size of the frogless, well – preserved bricks is approximately 0.22m. x 0.11m. x 45mm. (c.8¾” x 4¼” x 1¾”). They are characterised by their hard, brick – red fabric and can all be placed in a mid 18th – 19th century date bracket (Luke Barber: Research Officer, Sussex Archaeological Society pers. comm.). The bricks of the porch floor are indistinguishable visually from those used to construct the path that leads from the church to the lychgate at the main graveyard entrance. The church guidebook states that this path was ‘originally laid in 1756’ (Stamper, A, and J 1996, 22).
- 6.3. The lifting of the brick surface described above **(1)** exposed an immediately underlying c.10mm. – thick layer of compact, light beige lime - based mortar devoid of inclusions or associated artefacts **(3)**.
- 6.4. The subsequent stripping of Context 3 from the porch area revealed a homogeneous deposit of compact, mid grey – brown silty clay **(4)** containing c.10% fragments of ceramic building material dating to the mid 18th – 19th century (c.5mm. – 0.10m.) (Luke Barber pers. comm.) and 1% chalk and flint pieces (c.5mm. – 0.15m.). Context 4 was itself reduced / excavated to a

maximum overall depth below the original brick floor base of c.0.11m. However, no other deposits or artefact types were uncovered as a result of this procedure.

- 6.5. The stone slab located directly in front of the main church door comprised a c.1.21m. – long, 0.95m. – wide and 0.12m. – thick block of black marble **(2)** that prior to lifting formed a more or less flush / contiguous surface with the surrounding floor bricks **(1)** (Figure 3).
- 6.6. Although in possession of a smooth / polished uppermost (i.e. visible) face, the base of this unscribed marble block **(2)** was rough and uneven. Regularly – spaced toolmarks were observed along the vertical edges of the stone.
- 6.7. The temporary removal of the marble slab **(2)** exposed an immediately underlying and confined deposit of compact, mid grey – brown slity clay **(5)** containing c.20% fragments of ceramic building material and concrete (c.5mm. – 0.15m.) plus c.1% chalk and flint pieces (c.5mm. – 0.15m.). The small assemblage of ceramic building material recovered from Context 5 has been dated to the 19th century (Luke Barber pers. comm.). It can therefore be suggested that the marble slab was installed, or at least re-laid during the late 19th century replacement of the church's south door.
- 6.8. The subsequent excavation of Context 5 from the footprint of the marble block **(2)** revealed the aforementioned Context 4 (see Section 6.4.) c.80mm. below the original stone base level. The reduction of the porch formation ceased at this juncture.
- 6.9. No other archaeological contexts or artefacts were recorded during the fieldwork.

Table 1: Context Register.

CONTEXT NUMBER.	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION / PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIPS.	ASSOCIATED ARTEFACTS.
1.	Brick floor. Above 3. Adjacent 2.	
2.	Black marble slab. Above 5. Adjacent 1, 3, 4.	
3.	Layer of mortar. Above 4. Below 1. Adjacent 2.	
4.	Layer of silty clay. Below 3, 5. Adjacent 2.	Mid 18 th – 19 th C. ceramic building material.
5.	Layer of silty clay and 'hardcore'. Above 4 Below 2.	19 th C. ceramic building material.

7.0. CONCLUSIONS.

- 7.1. No previously unrecorded cut features or structures were exposed during the watching brief carried - out at St. Mary's Church, Ringmer. No fresh evidence for the origin or early history of the church's timber - framed south porch was thus discovered as a result of the project. It should also be noted that not one context of palaeoenvironmental potential was recorded.
- 7.2. Nevertheless, a mid 18th – 19th century date has been confirmed for the bricks used in the construction of the current south porch floor. The collated evidence would also suggest that the marble slab described in sections 6.5. and 6.6. was installed or re-laid during the late 19th century replacement of the church's main south door.
- 7.3. It is believed that the investigative methodology employed by C. G. Archaeology satisfied the primary objectives of the project defined in Section 4.0.

8.0. ARCHIVE.

- 8.1. It is intended that the full paper, digital and photographic records arising from this project will be collated in accordance with '*Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage*' (UKICI 1990) and deposited in a suitable local museum or similar repository approved by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and East Sussex County Council Archaeologist. The samples of floor brick and other ceramic building materials removed from the site for specialist examination are not considered to be meritorious of retention and will therefore be disposed of appropriately. A small selection of photographs has been appended to the CD – Rom copies of the report supplied to East Sussex County Council, Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and client.

9.0. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

9.1. C. G. Archaeology would like to thank Casper Johnson and Greg Chuter of East Sussex County Council, Vivienne Coad the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, Peter Pritchett of John D. Clarke and Partners (Chartered Architects) and David Johns Associates for their assistance during the project. Figure 2 utilises a church plan downloaded from www.ringmerchurch.org.uk. The relative levels shown on Figure 3 were supplied to C. G. Archaeology by David Johns Associates.

10.0. REFERENCES.

Martin, D. 2007. 'A brief architectural report on the south porch, St. Mary's Church, Ringmer, East Sussex', *Unpub. Archaeology South-East Report No. 2663*.

Nairn, I. and Pevsner, N. 2001. *The buildings of England: Sussex*, Penguin Books.

Stamper, A. and J. 1996. *A short guide to the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Ringmer, East Sussex*, Unpub. church guidebook.

SUMMARY SHEET.

Site Code.	RIC 08					
Site identification and address.	St. Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer					
County, district and / or borough.	East Sussex					
O.S. grid ref.	TQ 44575 12505					
Geology.	Gault					
Project number.	08 / 08					
Fieldwork type.	Eval.	Excav.	W.Brief.	Survey.	Other.	
			X			
Site type.	Rural.	Urban.	Other. Within church porch			
Date of fieldwork.	4 th – 13 th August 2008					
Client.	John D. Clarke and Partners.					
Project manager.	Christopher Greatorex					
Project supervisor	Christopher Greatorex					
Period summary.	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	B. Age.	I. Age.	R – B.
	A. S.	Med.	P. Med	Other.		
			X			
Project Summary.						
<p>An archaeological watching brief was maintained on the lifting of a brick paved floor and associated stone slab located within the open south porch of St. Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer. No previously unrecorded cut features or structures were discovered during the fieldwork. However, a mid 18th – 19th century date has been confirmed for the bricks used in the construction of the floor. The collated evidence would also suggest that the stone slab was installed or re-laid during the late 19th century replacement of the church's main south door.</p>						