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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the excavation of trenches to allow existing drains to be upgraded around the perimeter of St Vigeans Parish Church, near Arbroath, Angus. The watching brief was commissioned by GPA Humphries, Chartered Architects, at the behest of The Congregational Board of St Vigeans Parish Church, and was a condition imposed by Angus Council on the recommendation of their archaeological advisors, the Archaeology Service of Aberdeenshire Council. The redevelopment work was carried out by Cumming & Co and the watching brief by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 9th October 2008.

## THE SITE

There is believed to have been a Christian foundation at St Vigeans since the 7th century although the present church dates from the 12th century. The church (NO64SW 3) sits atop a glacial mound, occupying most of its summit, at NO 6384 4291. The original church, parts of which are visible in the north aisle, was extended during the 13th century and twice in the 15th century. At that stage the church comprised a nave, north and south aisles and a west tower. During restoration work in the late 19th century a second north aisle and a large apse were added and the west tower heightened.

As well as the church, St Vigeans is famous for the many Early Christian sculptured stones (six Class II and 23 Class III symbol stones) that were found within the building and its environs; they are now housed in a small museum nearby. Another interesting stone, believed to be part of a cross-slab, was noted within the south wall of the south aisle during the recent consolidation of the church fabric. This stone remains *in situ*.

## THE WATCHING BRIEF

The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the excavation of small trenches at the bases of downpipes around the church, at points where the drains appear to have become blocked. A total of seven trenches were opened, Trenches 1-3 against the north side of the building and Trenches 4-7 against its south side. All the trenches were dug by hand.

The locations of the trenches are shown on the accompanying plan.

### Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the angle between the west wall of the second (19th-century) north aisle and the north wall of the 12th-century aisle. The trench measured 1.1m east/west by 0.7m wide and cut through 0.4m of disturbed, dark brown topsoil intermixed with rubble and containing several fragments of disarticulated human bones. This material bottomed onto red-brown sandy loam which also contained disarticulated bones and which had been disturbed during the installation of the original drain. This deposit was left *in situ*.

The only feature of archaeological interest uncovered in Trench 1 consisted of the foundations of the north wall of the 19th-century aisle.

## **Trench 2**

Located between the west and central window of the north wall of the 19th-century north aisle, Trench 2 measured 1.2m east/west by 0.6m wide. The trench cut through tarmac, 0.3m of topsoil and rubble, containing disarticulated human remains, and a further 0.15m of red-brown, sandy soil which had been disturbed when the original drains were laid. No structures or features of archaeological significance were uncovered in this trench.

## **Trench 3**

Trench 3 was located some 4m east of Trench 2, between the central and east windows of the 19th-century north aisle. It measured 1.25m east/west by 0.6m wide and cut through tarmac, rubble and redeposited topsoil (total depth 0.3-0.4m) and 0.1m of underlying red-brown, sandy loam. Below the latter was coarse, glacial sand. Disarticulated human bones were recovered from the topmost layers; otherwise, nothing of archaeological interest was found in this trench.

## **Trench 4**

Trench 4 was located in the angle between the south wall of the apse and its south-east buttress. It measured 1.0m north/south by 0.55m wide and 0.3m deep, cutting only through soil disturbed during the installation of the adjacent drain, nothing of archaeological significance being uncovered.

## **Trench 5**

Trench 5 was located against the south wall of the south aisle, 0.5m from its east end. It measured 0.75m east/west by 0.5m wide and 0.3m deep and cut through tarmac and disturbed topsoil and rubble. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in this trench.

## **Trench 6**

Located midway along the south wall of the south aisle, Trench 6 measured 1.0m east/west by 0.6m wide. Below the tarmac were rubble and soil which had been disturbed during the installation of the adjacent drain. There was nothing of archaeological significance within this trench, other than a few fragments of disarticulated human bones.

## **Trench 7**

Measuring only 0.65m east/west by 0.5m wide, Trench 7 was located at the south-west corner of the church, against the outside face of its south aisle. It was a mere 0.25m deep and cut through concrete and disturbed soil and rubble, nothing of archaeological significance being uncovered.

## **FINDS**

No artefacts predating the 20th century were found in any of the trenches. The only finds of interest were disarticulated human skeletal remains within Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 6. However, these items were all recovered from deposits that had been disturbed in recent times and, on

the evidence from trenches against the north side of the church, probably on earlier occasions too. None of the finds was retained.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

With the exception of the foundations of the 19th-century north aisle, no structures or features of archaeological significance were exposed during these investigations. However, the likelihood of encountering human remains close to a medieval parish church is always high and St Vigean's proved no exception. Although no graves were uncovered, the presence of several disarticulated bones indicated that there had been burials within the area of investigation.

The installation of drains during the 19th century and later had clearly disturbed some human remains but, on the evidence of pre-modern deposits to the north of the church, burial practice also accounted for the dispersal of human remains, at least in that part of the site.

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs described below form part of the excavation archive and are not included in the report.

- 1 The church, viewed from the south-east
- 2 Trench 1 fully excavated, viewed from the north
- 3 Trench 1 fully excavated, viewed from the north-west
- 4 Trench 2 fully excavated, viewed from the north
- 5 Trench 3 fully excavated, viewed from the north
- 6 Trench 4 fully excavated, viewed from the south
- 7 The church, viewed from the west
- 8 Trench 5, viewed from the south
- 9 Trench 6, viewed from the south
- 10 View, from the west, along the north side of the church, showing the locations of Trenches 2 and 3
- 11 View, from the west, along the south side of the church, showing Trench 7 in the foreground and Trenches 6 and 5 beyond