

St John the Baptist Church
Lowick, Northumberland

Archaeological Watching Brief



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in April 2017, monitoring groundworks for new foundations for the rebuilding of two failing sections of the existing churchyard boundary wall surrounding St John the Baptist Church, Lowick, Northumberland. The monitoring was undertaken as a condition of a church faculty granting permission for the work.

The potential archaeological significance of the site, and hence the reason for the monitoring works, lies principally in its proximity to the Church of St John the Baptist. The existing church was developed between the late 18th and the late 19th century; however it stands on the site of an earlier church, and three examples of spoliated medieval stonework were incorporated within one of the sections of boundary wall to be rebuilt. The potential for finding further remains or stonework associated with that earlier church, as well as the potential for the works to encounter human remains within the churchyard, prompted the requirement for a watching brief to be maintained during groundworks.

The archaeological monitoring undertaken has shown that the existing churchyard walls at St John the Baptist Church, Lowick sit directly upon the natural clay substrate, with no formally constructed foundation. The two sections of newly dug foundation monitored by the watching brief suggested no disturbance from burials extending to or beyond the edge of the existing churchyard at these points, indicating that they mark the outer edge of the historic burial ground at its north and south-east sides. The lack of any other archaeological deposits or features has not allowed the watching brief to contribute significantly to the existing knowledge of the site, or to wider research agenda; however, this lack of evidence also has the opposing benefit of illustrating that the work monitored has not damaged any surviving archaeological deposits or human burials present at the site. A further conservation benefit of the monitored scheme has been the removal of the three architectural fragments from the actively deteriorating wall and their re-homing within the church.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

This report has been commissioned by AECOM and Northumberland County Council to outline the findings of a programme of archaeological monitoring (watching brief) on groundworks for new foundations for the rebuilding of two failing sections of the existing churchyard boundary wall surrounding the grade II listed Church of St John the Baptist (NHLE 1042253), Main Street, Lowick, Northumberland. The monitoring was undertaken as a condition of a church faculty granting permission for the work.

1.2 SITE LOCATION

The monitored works are located around the boundary of the churchyard of the grade II listed Church of St John the Baptist, Main Street, Lowick, Northumberland (NHLE 1042253). The church site is centred at NU 01192 39646 (Figure 1). The development site also lies close to a number of other grade II listed buildings.

1.3 POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The potential archaeological significance of the site, and hence the reason for the monitoring works, lies principally in its proximity to the Church of St John the Baptist. The existing church was developed between the late 18th and the late 19th century; however it stands on the site of an earlier church, and three examples of spoliated medieval stonework are incorporated within one of the sections of boundary wall to be rebuilt. The potential for finding further remains or stonework associated with that earlier church, as well as the potential for the works to encounter human remains within the churchyard, has prompted the requirement for a watching brief to be maintained during groundworks.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

An archaeological watching brief is defined as:

“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, intertidal 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” (ClfA 2014b, 2).

The overarching aim of the watching brief was:

- To ensure that significant archaeological remains were not destroyed without first being adequately recorded.

The objectives of the watching brief were:

- To record, excavate and environmentally sample any archaeological deposits of significance observed during the groundworks
- To establish the date, character and significance of any archaeological and palaeoenvironmental deposits, including in relation to other similar features within the area
- To ensure there is a permanent record of the work undertaken deposited with the local Historic Environment Record (HER) and made available online
- To ensure all work is undertaken in compliance with the *Code of Conduct* of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (ClfA) (2014a), the *ClfA Standard and Guidance for Watching Briefs* (revised 2014b), and the *Regional Statement of Good Practice*.



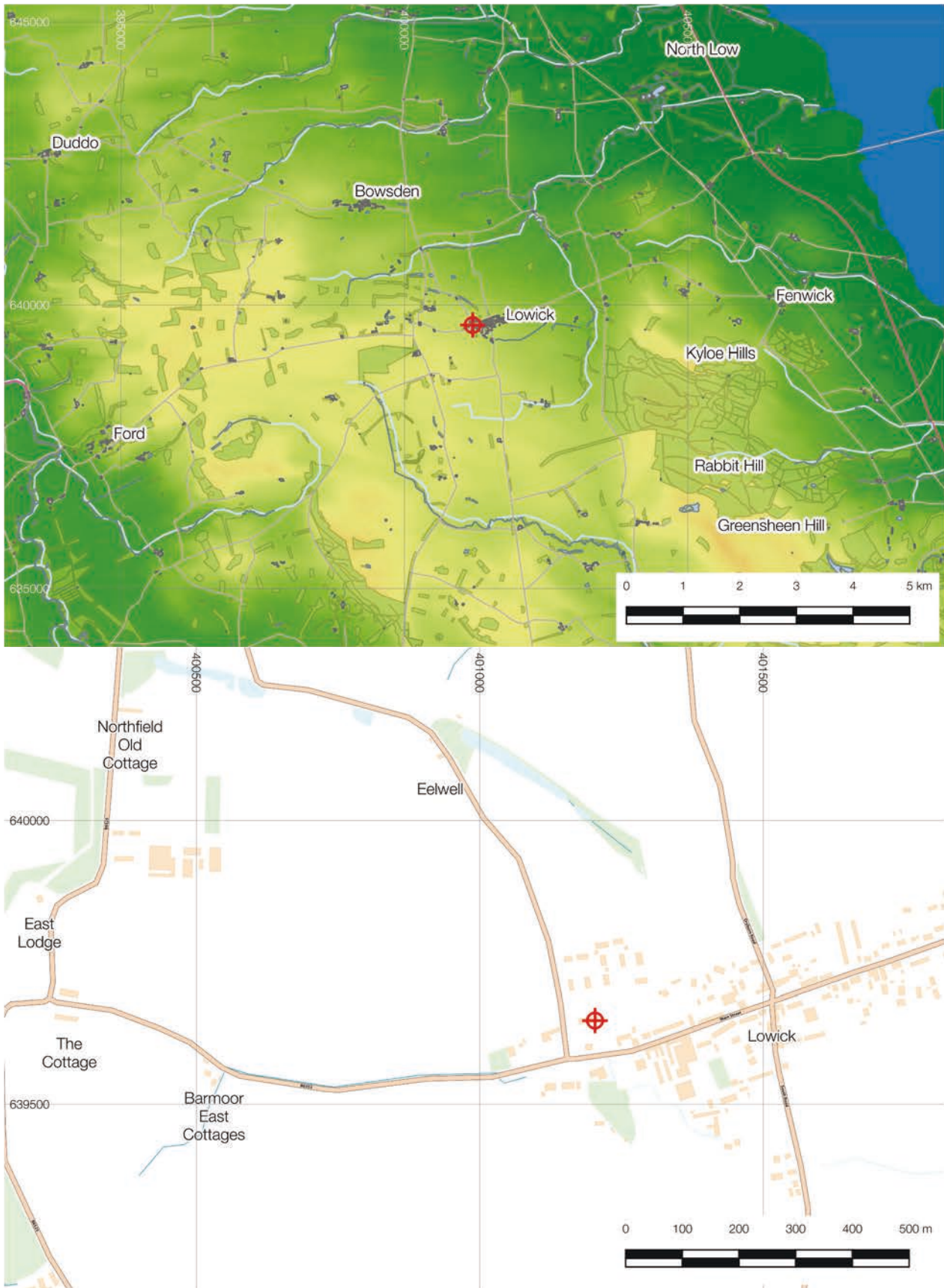


Figure 1 Site Location

2. POLICY AND GUIDANCE FRAMEWORK

2.1 GUIDANCE

2.1.1 ECCLESIASTICAL

The work monitored by the watching brief is governed by a Church of England faculty, which has set the requirement for a watching brief during excavation works. The faculty jurisdiction is the Church of England's regulation of works to church buildings, their contents and churchyards (The Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015). It ensures that churches are properly cared for, and that whatever is done to them is properly considered beforehand and carried out in the most appropriate way. The system recognises that churches are living buildings, many of which are of great historic significance but all of which exist as active places of worship and venues for other aspects of Christian mission or community work.

A faculty is a licence to carry out work, and any work carried out in the absence of a faculty is illegal. Although most Church of England churches are 'listed', they are exempt from listed building control except in certain unusual circumstances (where a church is not primarily in use for worship, or where total demolition is involved). Alteration and change is instead regulated by the faculty jurisdiction. The exemption does not apply to planning and building controls, Health and Safety or other legislation (*ibid.*).

2.1.2 NATIONAL

During the preparation of this document, the following guidance has been referred to, where relevant:

Document	Key Points
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (CLG 2014)	The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) released the guidance to NPPF in March 2014 in a 'live' online format which, it is intended, can be amended and responsive to comment, particularly as case law develops in relation to the implementation of NPPF. For cultural heritage the NPPG follows previous guidance in wording and 'keys in' with, in particular, extant Historic England guidance.
Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (Historic England 2008)	This document sets out the guiding principles of conservation as seen by Historic England and also provides a terminology for assessment of significance upon which much that has followed is based.
Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (ClfA 2014b)	This document represents non-statutory industry best practice as set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. The evaluation work has been undertaken to these standards, as subscribed to by Solstice Heritage.

Table 1 National guidance documentation consulted

2.1.3 REGIONAL

Archaeological work in Northumberland is often required to comply with *Yorkshire, The Humber and The North East: A Regional Statement of Good Practice for Archaeology in the Development Process* (SYAS 2011). The key principles in relation to the monitoring work undertaken are summarised in the table below:

Principle	Key Points
2	Archaeological work should be undertaken by professionally qualified and appropriately experienced archaeologists and organisations.
3	All archaeological work will have a scope agreed in advance with the archaeological curator (this document), and any changes to the scope or methodology will be agreed in writing with the archaeological curator.
4	Monitoring of archaeological work by the local archaeological curator will be the norm, and reasonable notice of commencement of fieldwork will be given.

Principle	Key Points
5	Archaeological work will be undertaken in accordance with the best practice guidance of English Heritage and the IfA.
6	The local Historic Environment Record should be consulted prior to the commencement of fieldwork.
7	Archaeological work in the planning process should have regard to national and local published research agenda (see section 4.2 below)
9	Reports and required data will be submitted to the archaeological curator and local HER in a timely fashion and in accordance with the agreed WSI.
10	Any comments made by the archaeological curator on reports and outputs will be made within a reasonable timetable of receipt.
11	Where appropriate significant archaeological findings will be submitted for publication in a suitable journal or journals.
12	Any archive produced will be deposited in an ordered and acceptable fashion within a reasonable timetable, the details of which will be given in the report.
13	During the course of archaeological work arrangements will be made, where possible, for disseminating information about the site to the general public.

Table 2 Key principles of the Regional Statement of Good Practice

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 FIELDWORK

The two sections of failing boundary wall (Figure 2), one immediately to the right of the entrance into the churchyard from Main Street and the other at the north side of the churchyard at its boundary with Church Lane, were taken down by contractors between 10th and 13th April 2017, in advance of rebuilding on the same footprint. New foundations for both sections of wall were excavated to improve the stability of the rebuilt areas. All groundworks were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist, and all excavations were carried out by hand. Should archaeological features or deposits have been encountered, these would have been recorded to the standards outlined in the relevant CfA *Standard and Guidance* (2014b). All features and deposits would have been recorded on *pro forma* record sheets, drawn in plan and section at a suitable scale and photographed. No deposits with palaeoenvironmental potential were noted. In addition to any specific features or deposits, a general record of the trench stratigraphy was made on a *pro forma* record sheet.

3.2 POST-FIELDWORK

The primary site archive was compiled, comprising site records and digital photography. This has been used to compile this report, which will be deposited with the local HER as the principal record of the monitoring work undertaken. If considered to be of sufficient significance following discussion with AECOM, the documentary archive will be deposited with a suitable local collections museum within six months of the submission of this report. A suitable OASIS record will be completed for this work, including a digital version of the report uploaded, within the same timescale. The OASIS reference for this project is solstice1-283390.

3.3 CHRONOLOGY

Where chronological and archaeological periods are referred to in the text, the relevant date ranges are broadly defined in calendar years as follows:

- Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age): 1 million – 12,000 BP (Before present)
- Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age): 10000 – 4000 BC
- Neolithic (New Stone Age): 4000 – 2400 BC
- Chalcolithic/Beaker Period: 2400 – 2000 BC
- Bronze Age: 2000 – 700 BC
- Iron Age: 700 BC – AD 70
- Roman/Romano-British: AD 70 – 410
- Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Scandinavian: AD 410 – 1066
- Medieval: AD 1066 – 1540
- Post-medieval: AD 1540 – 1750
- Industrial: AD 1750 – 1900
- Modern: AD 1900 – Present

3.4 ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Data and information obtained and consulted in the compilation of this report has been derived from a number of secondary sources. Where it has not been practicable to verify the accuracy of secondary information, its accuracy has been assumed in good faith. All statements and opinions arising from the works undertaken are provided in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

3.5 COPYRIGHT

Solstice Heritage LLP will retain the copyright of all documentary and photographic material under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act (1988).





4. RESULTS

4.1 SECTION OF WALL AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE CHURCHYARD FROM MAIN STREET

The failing section of wall to the immediate right of the gateway into the churchyard from Main Street (Figure 3) was deconstructed by contractors, by hand, on the 11th April 2017. The wall was found to have no meaningful foundation, instead sitting directly upon the existing ground surface. Three architectural stone elements were previously identified as having been incorporated into the build of the existing wall, and these were carefully removed by hand during deconstruction (Figure 4). Peter Ryder, the diocesan archaeological advisor, has identified these fragments as parts of a probable early 12th-century tympanum, a 12th-century cross slab grave cover and a 15th- or early 16th-century window head (Peter Ryder, pers. comm. October 2015). Nothing was noted upon inspection after removal to cast doubt upon, or add to, this interpretation. The removed fragments were transported to covered storage in the church porch for future preservation and display.

Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of a new foundation for the rebuilt section of wall, on the original footprint of the removed section, was carried out on 12th April 2017. The excavation for the new foundation was c. 0.7 m in width and c. 3.3 m in length (Figure 5). The depth of the new foundation trench measured 0.25 m below the existing ground level. The trench was cut into a seemingly undisturbed mid-brown silty clay subsoil (001), which was not penetrated by the excavation. No archaeological features or finds were noted, including any human remains or further architectural fragments from the build of the wall itself.



Figure 3 Failing section of wall adjacent to the entrance to the churchyard from Main Street, prior to the commencement of works, looking north-east. Scale 1x1 m



Figure 4 Carved stone elements after removal during deconstruction works. No scale



Figure 5 Completed excavation for new wall foundation, looking north. Scale 1x1 m

4.2 SECTION OF WALL AT THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CHURCHYARD, ADJACENT TO CHURCH LANE

The failing section of wall to the north side of the churchyard, adjacent to Church Lane (Figure 6) was deconstructed by contractors, by hand, on the 11th April 2017. The wall was found to have no foundation, instead sitting directly upon the existing ground surface. No architectural stone elements were identified within the build of this length of wall.

Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of a new foundation for the rebuilt section of wall, on the original footprint of the removed section, was carried out on 18th April 2017. The excavation for the new foundation was c. 0.9 m in width and c. 7.2 m in length (Figure 7). The depth of the new foundation trench measured 0.20 m below the existing ground level. The trench was cut into a seemingly undisturbed mid-brown clay till substrate (002), which was not penetrated by the excavation. No archaeological features or finds were noted, including any human remains or architectural fragments from the build of the wall itself.



Figure 6 Failing length of wall at the north side of the churchyard, adjacent to Church Lane, prior to the commencement of works, looking south-east. Scale 1x1 m



Figure 7 New foundation trench for northern section of rebuilt wall, looking east. Note old wall sitting on clay till substrate. Scale 2x1 m

5. DISCUSSION

The archaeological monitoring undertaken has shown that the existing churchyard walls at St John the Baptist Church, Lowick sit directly upon the natural clay substrate, with no formally constructed foundation. The two sections of newly dug foundation monitored by the watching brief suggested no disturbance from burials extending to or beyond the edge of the existing churchyard at these points, indicating that they mark the outer edge of the historic burial ground at its north and south-east sides. The lack of any other archaeological deposits or features has not allowed the watching brief to contribute significantly to the existing knowledge of the site or to wider research agenda, however, this lack of evidence also has the opposing benefit of illustrating that the work monitored has not damaged any surviving archaeological deposits or human burials present at the site. A further conservation benefit of the monitored scheme has been the removal of the three architectural fragments from the actively deteriorating wall and their re-homing within the church.



6. SOURCES

6.1 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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