

**St. Mary's Church, Shipley, West Sussex**  
**Report on a Recording Brief**  
2<sup>nd</sup> May 2003



St. Mary's Church, from the south

**Disclaimer**

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the specification. All statements and opinions are offered in good faith; but West Sussex Archaeology Ltd. cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

## Contents

List of Figures	3
Non-Technical Summary	4
1. Background	5
2. Aims and Objectives	6
3. Methodology	6
4. Results	7
5. Conclusion	12
6. Archive Location	12
7. Bibliography	13

## List of Figures

Fig.1	Site Location	5
Fig.2	Plan of St.Mary's Church	6
Fig.3	Plan of the drain trench	7
Fig.4	Photograph of the drain trench	8
Fig.5	Sections 1-4	8
Fig.6	Harris matrix of all contexts	9
Fig.7	Photograph of wall foundation 102	10
Fig.8	1 <sup>st</sup> Edition OS 1:2500 map, showing Shipley church	11

**NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

*A recording brief, carried out in the graveyard of St.Mary's Church as part of drainage works, revealed evidence for a possible precinct wall to the Templar Preceptory known to have existed on the site. The presence of building rubble suggested that some further remains may lie within the area of the drainage works, but that these would lie below the depth of 0.5m reached as part of this project.*

## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Topography

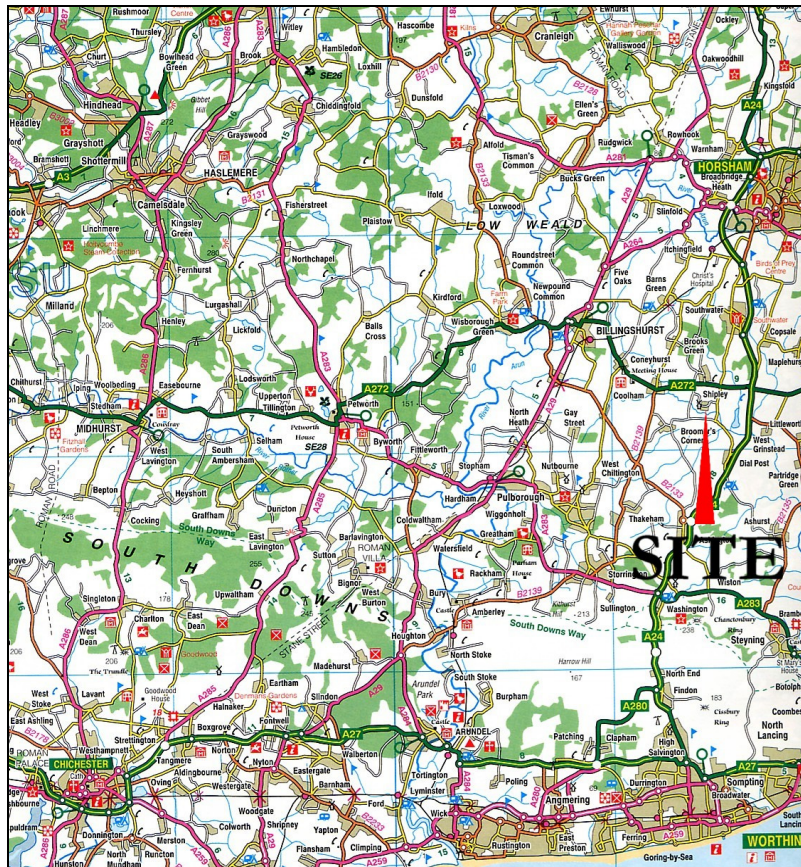


Fig.1 Site location. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068.

1. St Mary's Church lies within the ecclesiastical parish of Shipley, approximately 6 miles to the south of Horsham in West Sussex. The church lies close to the river Adur, at the south-east end of the current village of Shipley at 14m OD and NGR TQ14482181.
2. The Geology is Lower Cretaceous Weald clay, with sandstone pockets. Previous excavations to the south of the church revealed sandstone approximately 0.9m below the current ground surface (Winbolt 1934).

### 1.2 Reasons for and circumstances of the project

1. As part of a 'de minimis' project, the PCC of St.Mary's, Shipley, have carried out new drainage works across the churchyard. The Diocesan Advisory Committee had directed that these works should be subject to archaeological recording and that a Recording Brief was the most appropriate scheme of works for this development. West Sussex Archaeology was employed by Shipley PCC to undertake the recording brief.

### 1.3 Historical & Archaeological background

1. A church existed at Shipley as earlier as AD1080, although no mention is made of either it or a manor in the Domesday Book. In AD 1139 the manor and church were given to the Knights Templars by Philip de Harcourt, the present church's nave, chancel and tower dating from this period. In AD 1308 the Templar Preceptory at Shipley was suppressed, and its lands given to the Knights Hospitallers. In AD1541, at the Dissolution, the manor was taken from the Hospitallers and given to Arundel College, who held it only until AD1544, when it passed into private hands.
2. It has been suggested that the Preceptory lay to the immediate south of the church, however excavations conducted in the 1920's and 1930's in this area revealed little trace of it. Two trenches, whose precise locations are not given, revealed some evidence of building debris and flagged pathways, but nothing structural (Winbolt 1934). What are believed to have been the fishponds attached to the Preceptory lay to the south-east of the church, but were destroyed in the 1960's.

### 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To record and interpret any archaeological features exposed during ground works to an acceptable standard.
2. To record and analyse any significant discoveries of artefactual and/or ecofactual evidence to an acceptable standard.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

1. The methodology for this recording brief was set out in a project design drawn up by West Sussex Archaeology (WSA 2003). The fieldwork was carried out on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April. During the course of the fieldwork several changes were made to the methodology as set out in the project design.

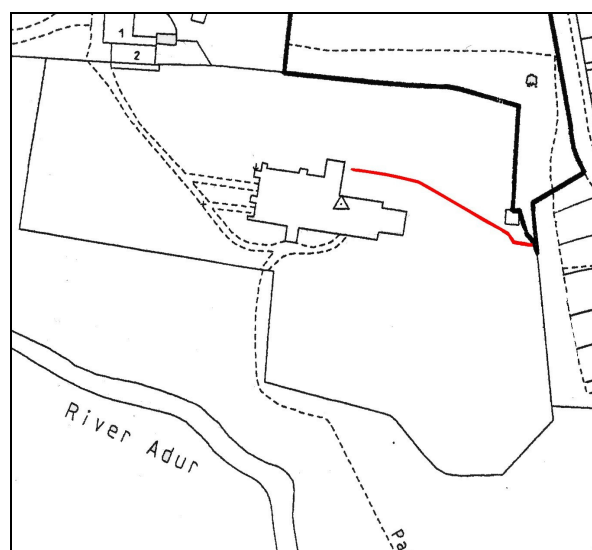


Fig.2 Plan of St.Mary's Church, showing location of drain trench in red.. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068.

2. The drain trench was to have run due east from the vestry to the east boundary of the churchyard. However due to the presence of grave stones, and the desirability of the drain emptying into the surrounding ditch at a more southerly point, the eventual site of the trench was that shown in **Fig.2**.
3. The second change to the methodology as set out in the project design, was that it was found to be unnecessary to supervise the enlargement of the sump, since it evolved merely widening the aperture through a stone slab and re-use of an existing drain.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Description

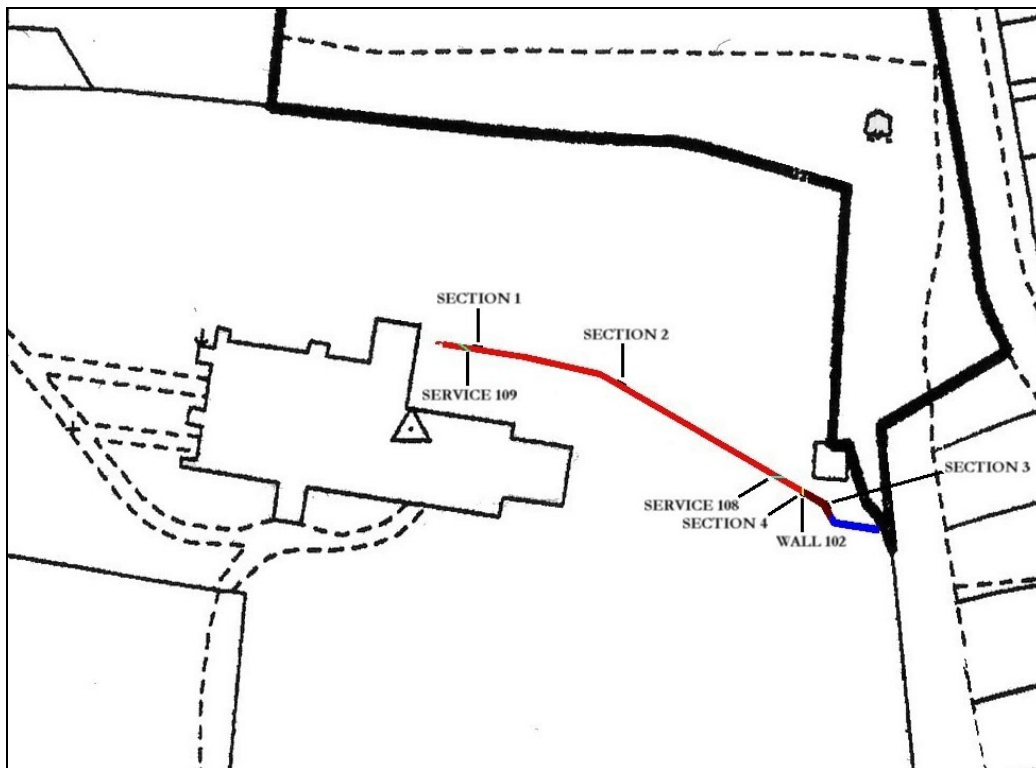


Fig.3 Plan of drain trench. The red indicates layer 101, brown layer 104 and blue 105.  
© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

1. The drain trench ran approximately east-west for 45 metres until it reached the edge of the ditch which surrounds the modern churchyard on its north and east sides. The trench was 0.25m wide and varied slightly in depth along its length, from between 0.4m to 0.5m. Level readings taken along the trench reveal a drop in height of 0.69m from its west end to section 3, and a further drop of 0.48m from section 3 to the edge of the churchyard.



Fig.4 Photograph of the drain trench, taken from the church tower and looking north.

2. For the greater part of its length the deposit found in the base of the trench consisted of mixed clays with silt (101). These showed much evidence of disturbance and contained occasional fragments of stone, some of it roughly dressed, and tile. At its eastern end the base of the trench became composed of a clean, red/brown clay (104). The division between the two deposits (101 & 104) was marked by a deposit of white degraded mortar, approximately 0.30m wide and 0.15m deep (102). The clay deposit (104) was overlain at the extreme east end of the drain trench by a layer of dumped rubbish (105). Two modern service trenches were located along the line of the trench (108 & 109), both of which were for electric cables and appeared to be out of use.

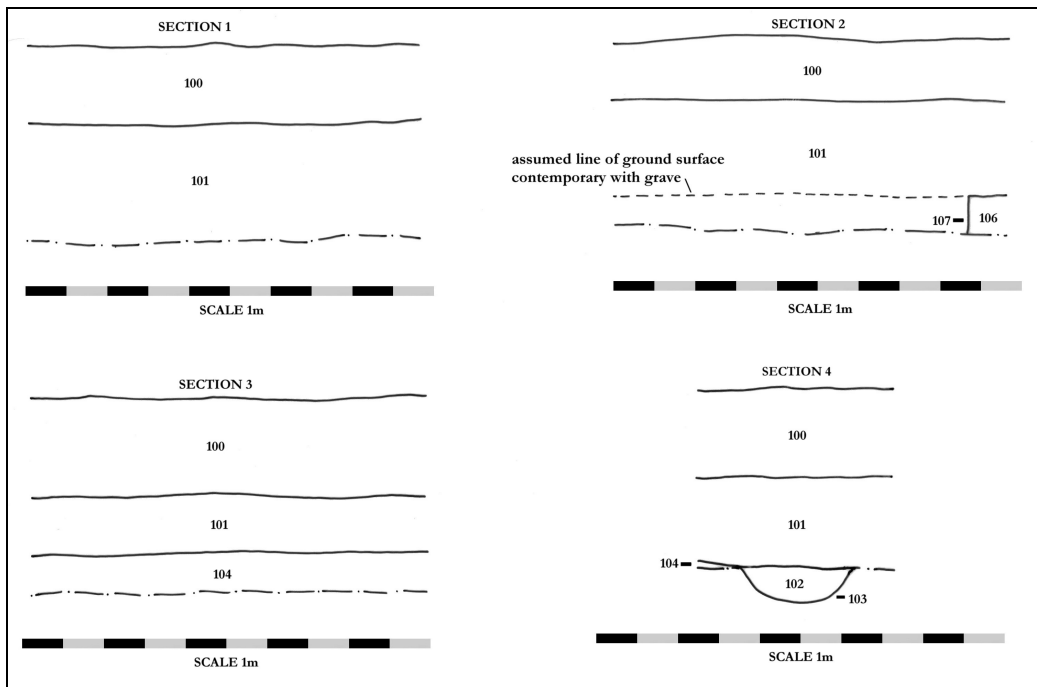


Fig.5 Sections 1-4, all are south facing with the exception of section 4, which faces north.



- Four sections were drawn along the line of the trench to illustrate the nature of the deposits described above. Section 1, at the west end of the trench, revealed only two layers, the modern topsoil (100) and the underlying mixed clay deposit (101). Section two, to the east, showed the same two layers, but with what appears to be a grave cut (107) dug through part of deposit (101). Section 3, located where the clay layer (104) appeared, reveals three deposits, the overlying topsoil (100), the mixed clay later (101) and underlying these the clean clay (104). Section 4, place over the white mortar (102), shows the same sequence of layer as section 3, but with the cut (103) for the mortar dug through the clean clay (104) and underlying the mixed clay (101).

#### 4.2. Discussion

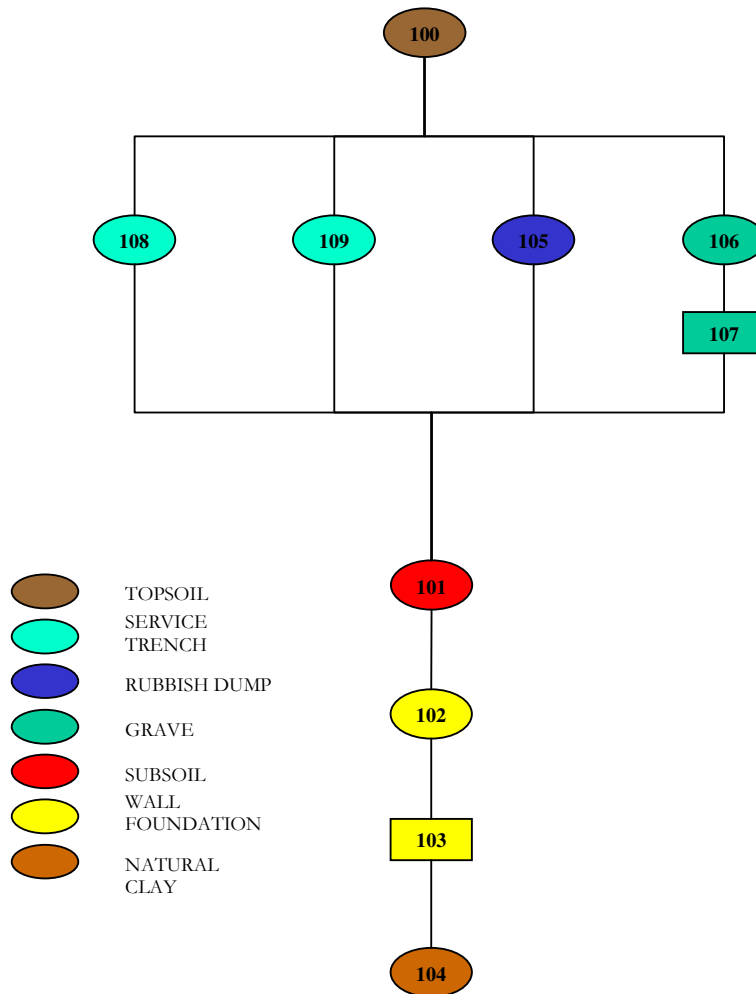


Fig.6 Harris matrix of all contexts found within drain trench. The earliest deposits are at the base of the matrix, the latest at the top

1. As seen in **Fig.6**, the earliest deposit revealed by this recording brief was the clean clay (**104**), which is likely to be the undisturbed Weald clay. Dug into this at an unknown date is the cut for the mortar deposit (**102**). Only a very limited area of this feature was visible, due to the small width of the drain trench, however it does appear to be running approximately north-south, parallel to the ditch to the east. It seems likely that it represent all that is left of the foundations for a wall. It is tempting to see this wall as once extending along the inside of the encircling ditch for its entire length, but from such a limited excavation this can be no more than speculation.



**Fig.7.** Photograph showing the remains of the wall foundations **102**, looking south. The extreme narrowness of the trench made it difficult to get good photographs of any of the sections.

2. Above this mortar lies the mixed clay deposit (**101**) which was found throughout the trench. This obviously represented a layer of disturbed ground, the most likely explanation for it being indicated by the grave cut (**107**) in section 2. This grave appears to have been cut from a point in the middle of the layer, rather than its top, pointing to the fact that this deposit has built up over the centuries as a result of grave-digging and other forms of ground disturbance. Its very mixed nature and the limited size of drain trench, makes it impossible to distinguish individual surface horizons within it without more extensive excavation.
3. The depth of the mixed clay layer (**101**) can be guessed at by comparing the levels taken along the drain trench. The Weald clay (**104**), where it was found at the east end of the trench, lay at approximately 13.25m OD. If the clay lies on a relatively flat plain east-west then at the west end of the trench its surface would lie approximately 1.10m below the current ground level. Such a depth of deposit is not impossible, since earlier excavations in the southern part of the graveyard encountered the natural geology at a depth of 0.90m below the surface.
4. These figures suggest that any undisturbed archaeological remains could lie buried beneath a thick layer of mixed clay build-up throughout much of the churchyard, particularly as the modern surface rises towards the church. The fact

that such remains do exist is hinted at by the discoveries of building stone and tile in the mixed clay layer (101) created by the deeper excavations necessary for graves.

5. Aside from the two modern service trenches (108 & 109), the only other feature in the drain trench was a dump of modern rubbish at its extreme east end. This consisted almost entirely of broken urns and vases from grave displays. The area is still used for the dumping of rubbish. It would appear from the lack of any visible Weald clay (104) at this point, that this rubbish is filling in a dip in the ground level. It seems probable from examining the alignment of the ditch which lies to the east, that it was originally wider at this point, and such rubbish dumping has narrowed it to its present width. The 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS 1:2500 map of Shipley indicates that the ditch had already been partially in-filled by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

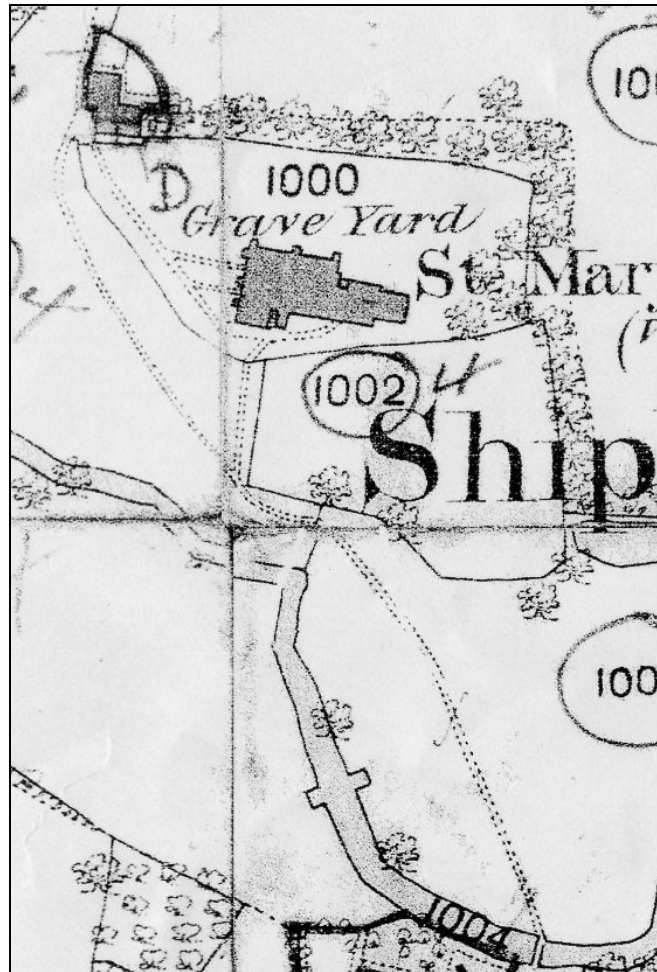


Fig.8 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS 1:2500 map, showing Shipley church. The kink about half way up the eastern ditch probably marks where its has been in-filled to the south.

## 5. CONCLUSION

1. The area within which the Templar Preceptory of Shipley must lie can be defined by various landscape features. The northern boundary is set by the ditch on the north side of the churchyard. The eastern, by the continuation of that ditch and the fishponds to the south-east. And the southern boundary is created by the river Adur and the jetties on its northern bank. The existence of such jetties is confirmed by the bollard in the church porch, taken from the river, and by the presence of masonry in the river bed against the northern bank, which can still be felt under the water. Interestingly, visible on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map (**Fig.8**), are two opposing indentations in the river banks south of the church. It is suggested that these represent a turning point for barges that have navigated up the river to Shipley.
2. The assumption at present appears to be that the Preceptory was a building detached from the church, however this need not be the case. Other examples of Templar Preceptories and Hospitaller Commanderies indicate that many included a chapel/church within a complex of secular buildings (Wood 1965, p.232-3). This has to remain an intriguing possibility at Shipley and the current church fabric itself does not rule this out. Any scars left on the church walls by the removal of other buildings when it was converted to a parish church, have probably been lost due to re-facing and re-building works. It is possible that a thorough survey of the church may reveal some clues.
3. Both the earlier excavations in the 1920's and 1930's, and this recording brief, have failed to locate the Preceptory. They can not even be said to have ruled out any locations, due to their limited extent. Certainly the present works have not reached a depth sufficient to indicate if it lay to the east or north of the church.
4. The only evidence recovered from the recording brief has been the wall foundation (**102**) discovered close to eastern ditch, which may represent the remains of a demolished precinct wall to the Preceptory, and the building rubble thrown up by grave digging in the mixed clay layer (**101**) that may indicate the remains of structures existing below the base of the drain trench. The only way of proving these conjectures would be by much more extensive excavation, down to a depth of at least 1m in the more central parts of the graveyard.

## 6. ARCHIVE LOCATION

1. The project archive shall be deposited with Horsham District Museum. The accession number given to this project is: 2003.606.
2. Copies of this report will be given to West Sussex County SMR, West Sussex Record Office, and the client.

**7. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- English Heritage. 1991. *Management of Archaeological Projects*. English Heritage.
- Hickman, D. 1944. *The Knights Templars at Shipley*. Sussex County Magazine 18, pp. 137-8.
- Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1999. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief*. IFA.
- Institute of Field Archaeology. 1997. *Code of Conduct*. IFA.
- Victoria County History of Sussex, Vol. VI pt 2, pp.113-4. **Shipley**. HMSO
- West Sussex Archaeology. 2003. *St.Mary's Church, Shipley, West Sussex, Project Design for a Recording Brief*. Unpublished.
- Winbolt, S.E. 1934. *The Knights Templars at Shipley*. Sussex Notes and Queries, Vol.5, pp.125-6.
- Wood, M. 1965. *The English Medieval House*. Bracken Books. London.