

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
UNDERTAKEN AT ALL SAINTS CHURCH, CHURCH ROAD,
HERSTMONCEUX, EAST SUSSEX.**

N. G. R. TQ 64275 10175

Project Number 07 / 8

January 2008

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ABSTRACT.

An archaeological watching brief was maintained on the cutting of a new drainage / fuel – line trench and cesspool tank at All Saints Church, Church Road, Herstmonceux.

The groundworks subject to archaeological monitoring exposed three unmarked brick vaults of uncertain date. The corner of a lead coffin was observed through a small hole in the roof of Vault 1. The presence within Vault 3 of at least one extant human skeleton was also confirmed. The contents of the undamaged and thus still sealed Vault 2 were not ascertained.

A modest number of disarticulated human bones, one segment of Post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem, an iron coffin handle and an iron nail were also recovered from the excavated deposits.

1.0. INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1. This document presents the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the cutting of a new drainage / fuel - line trench and cesspool tank within the cemetery of All Saints Church, Church Road, Herstmonceux, East Sussex (N. G. R. TQ 64275 10175) (figures 1 and 2).
- 1.2. Wealden District Council has granted planning permission for the conversion of the church's South Aisle Porch into a tea-room and cloakroom (Wealden District Council Planning Application Number WD/2005/0544/JF). However, it was believed that the groundworks associated with the proposed scheme (see Section 1.1.) could impact upon buried features, structures and / or deposits of archaeological significance. A condition was thus attached to the planning approval requiring the implementation of an agreed programme of archaeological enquiry and recording.
- 1.3. A site meeting attended by Peter Pritchett of John D. Clarke and Partners (Chartered Architects) Casper Johnson the East Sussex County Council Archaeologist and Christopher Greateorex of C. G. Archaeology was held on the 14th September 2007 to consider the intended works at the church and the appropriate archaeological response. As a result of these discussions it was agreed that the cutting of the drainage / fuel - line trench and cesspool tank within the graveyard should be subject to a constant archaeological watching brief. It was also confirmed that no structural alterations requiring archaeological mitigation / input were to be made to the South Aisle Porch of the church.
- 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. A faculty authorising the intended works was issued on the 15th July 2005 (AD078/05).

- 1.5. The archaeological fieldwork was carried – out by Christopher Greated and Annalie Wood of C. G. Archaeology between the 15th and 19th October 2007.
- 1.6. All aspects of the project were commissioned by Peter Pritchett of John D. Clarke and Partners, to whom thanks are extended.

2.0. GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND.

- 2.1. The 1: 50,000 British Geological Survey (Sheet 319: Lewes) records the 'natural' geology at the site as Tunbridge Wells Sand.
- 2.2. The church lies on an area of relatively high flat land overlooking the Pevensey Levels to the south and west.

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 All Saints Church has been extracted from “The buildings of England: Sussex” by Ian Nairn and Nikolaus Pevsner.
- 3.2. ‘The church is of c.1180 – 1200 and of the mid C15. The NW tower and N arcade come first. The tower has lancet bell-openings, one each side set in a triplet so that the l. and r. lancets are blank. Flat clasping buttresses with very shallow off-sets. Later shingled broach spire. The arch to the N aisle is pointed and has only a slight chamfer on simple imposts. The N arcade is of two bays. The pier and abacus are both octagonal, the responds and their abaci too, the arches are double-chamfered. The capitals of responds and pier have broad simple single leaves, really entirely pre-stiff-leaf. The S arcade on the other hand (three bays, slenderer piers) has the typical Sussex early stiff-leaf of one row of small leaves only showing much of the bell below. In the S aisle a cusped tomb recess and an E. E. capital by it. The aisle, as also the N aisle, is lit by dormer windows of the Victorian restoration. Straight-headed simple C14 windows. Rough two-storeyed S porch. The N chapel was built of brick about 1440 and the chancel at the same time all but rebuilt, also of brick’ (Nairn and Pevsner 2001, 533-4).
- 3.3. The original settlement at Herstmonceux is often said to have been located near All Saints Church, with the migration to the site of the present village perhaps resulting from the emparking of the area in 1441. However, it should be noted that no traces of medieval occupation have as yet been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the church (also see Section 6.1.6.).

4.0. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

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

- Maintain an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of a new drainage / fuel - line trench and cesspool tank at All Saints Church, Herstmonceux. All human remains, structural remains, cut features, grave stones, artefacts and ecofacts of archaeological interest exposed and / or affected by the monitored works will be recorded and interpreted to appropriate professional standards.

5.0. INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY.

- 5.1. An inspection was first made of the East Sussex County Historical Environment Record. It should be reiterated that no examination of historic cartographic / documentary sources stored at the East Sussex Record Office, Lewes or by the church authorities was required as part of the current investigation.
- 5.2. The groundworks shown on Figure 2 were carried-out by the project's main contractor (J. H. Builders) under the constant supervision of C. G. Archaeology. The new drainage / fuel - line trench was dug by hand. However, the excavation of the deeper cesspool tank required the use of a tracked mechanical digger fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. In this way even spits were removed from the cuttings until the prescribed depth had been reached.
- 5.3. Each archaeological layer exposed during the fieldwork was investigated manually in order to assess its archaeological / palaeoenvironmental potential and then documented on an individual Context Record Sheet.
- 5.4. The three brick vaults discovered within the new drainage / fuel line trench were also described in writing, planned at a scale of 1: 10 and levelled with respect to Ordnance Datum.
- 5.5. All disarticulated / displaced human skeletal remains recovered from the excavated deposits were bagged and secured for subsequent re-interment.
- 5.6. A groundworks location plan was prepared at a scale of 1: 100 and a full photographic record of the fieldwork maintained as appropriate.

6.0. RESULTS OF BACKGROUND RESEARCH.

6.1. The Historical Environment Record.

6.1.1. An inspection of the East Sussex County Historical Environment Record produced just five entries of historical / archaeological significance within a c.500m. radius of All Saints Church. These are listed in numerical order and described briefly below. Full details of the search are held within the Project Archive (see Section 9.0).

6.1.2. SMR No: MES4395
Grid Ref: TQ 6436 1018
Date: Romano-British

Roman pottery found in Herstmonceux Park on 19th March 1894. Field investigations undertaken during 1972 failed to locate any additional finds or features.

6.1.3. SMR No: MES4396
Grid Ref: TQ 6466 1040
Date: Medieval - Post-medieval

Herstmonceux Castle built by Sir Roger Fiennes in 1441. An early example of the use of brick on a large scale. Comprising a large quadrangular structure measuring about 208 x 219 feet, with towers at each corner. Once completely encircled by a large moat. Internally all that remains of the original fabric is the ground floor of the great gatehouse and the inner or courtyard wall of the South Range. Everything else was gutted for building material in 1777. Modern restoration was undertaken between the years 1911 and 1935. A Grade 1 Listed Building.

6.1.4. SMR No: MES4397
Grid Ref: TQ 646 103
Date: Romano-British

A coin of Antoninus Pius found at Herstmonceux Castle.

6.1.5. SMR No: MES4398
Grid Ref: TQ 6427 1019
Date: Medieval - Modern

All Saints Church, Church Road, Herstmonceux (see Section 3.2. for details).

6.1.6. SMR No: MES4444
Grid Ref: TQ 643 103
Date: Medieval

In some quarters the original settlement at Herstmonceux is believed to have been located near All Saints Church. A migration to the site of the present day village was perhaps the result of Roger Fiennes being granted permission to empark his land in 1441. However, no evidence for any medieval occupation has yet been discovered in the vicinity of the church (also see Section 3.3.).

7.0. RESULTS OF FIELDWORK.

7.1. The new drainage / fuel - line trench.

- 7.1.1. A c.50mm. – 0.20m. – thick layer of loose, mid grey - brown silty clay loam topsoil (**Context 1**) was first stripped from the c.0.30m. – wide drainage / fuel - line trench shown on Figure 2.
- 7.1.2. This procedure revealed a loose, mid orange – brown silty clay loam ‘graveyard soil’ containing occasional rounded pebbles (c.10mm.) and fragments of 19th / 20th century brick / tile (c.10mm. – 0.10m.) (**Context 2**).
- 7.1.3. The examination of the removed soil (**contexts 1, 2**) gleaned a small assemblage of displaced, disarticulated and fragmentary human bone clearly indicative of earlier cemetery disturbance. It should be noted that these bones were not subject to quantification or specialist osteological analysis. A single short segment of Post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem, an iron coffin handle and an iron nail were also recovered.
- 7.1.4. Rather more importantly, the excavation of Context 2 unveiled the tops of three unmarked brick vaults (**V1, V2, V3**) at a depth below the original ground surface of between c.0.30m. and 0.40m. (Figure 3).
- 7.1.5. Only one c.1.93m. – long edge of Vault 1 (**V1**) was exposed within the trench. Even so, the corner of an *in-situ* lead coffin could be seen through a small hole in the vault roof located at the western end of the structure. The vault itself was built of bricks bonded together by a seemingly inclusion – free, lime – based mortar. Although a mortar ‘screed’ prevented the dimensions of these particular bricks from being ascertained, they appeared similar to those used in the construction of both vaults 2 (**V2**) and 3 (**V3**) (see sections 7.1.6. and 7.1.7.). No intrusive examination of the vault’s chamber

or contents was undertaken. Instead, following all necessary archaeological recording, the unwelcome opening in the roof was re-sealed with concrete.

7.1.6. Just one edge of Vault 2 (**V2**) was revealed within the trench. This structure possessed a maximum recorded length of 2.48m. and (superficially at least) appeared to have been built using the same techniques and materials as Vault 1. An external mortar 'screed' again prevented the size of the individual bricks from being distinguished. The contents of the undamaged and thus still sealed vault also remain a matter of conjecture. It should be noted that the gap found between vaults 1 and 2 proved wide enough to accommodate the new drainage pipe and fuel – line.

7.1.7. Vault 3 (**V3**) was c.2.43m. long. Unfortunately, the western end of this structure's roof had collapsed, exposing the rather jumbled bones of a human skeleton located at a depth below the original ground surface of c.1.08m. No evidence for a coffin could be seen through the void in the roof. However, the interred individual seemed to be lying in a supine position with its skull towards the east. The vertical ends of the vault and the arch of the roof itself were also observed and photographed. Vault 3 was built of c.0.225m. (c.9") long, 0.11m. (c.4¼") wide and 60mm. (c.2¼") thick bricks (without frogs) bonded together with an inclusion – free, lime – based mortar. No physical examination of the human remains was undertaken. Instead the bones were carefully covered with a thick blanket of protective fibreglass and the vault re-sealed. A sample of the brick is retained as part of the Site Archive (see Section 9.0.).

7.1.8. The precise date of the three vaults and two interments revealed during the fieldwork has proved impossible to ascertain within the limited confines of this particular investigation. The presence of a lead coffin (see Section 7.1.5.) may well indicate a degree of antiquity (and certainly status). On the other hand, the bricks used to build the vaults (quite possibly the same for all three structures) are relatively modern; seemingly of late 19th or early 20th century origin. It is thus conceivable that some burials at the church have been re-

housed (and perhaps even moved to a new location) some years after their original interment. A study of historic photographs held by the East Sussex Record Office failed to shed any light upon this matter. However, useful additional information could be provided by a more detailed appraisal of church documents (beyond the remit of the current report).

- 7.1.9. No other structures, coffins, skeletal remains, cut features, deposits or artefacts were revealed within the drainage / fuel - line trench, which away from the three recorded vaults had a maximum depth of 0.63m.

7.2. The new cesspool tank.

- 7.2.1. Contexts 1 and 2 were first stripped from the 3m. x 3m. area of the cesspool tank shown on Figure 2. This procedure revealed the natural Tunbridge Wells Sand (**Context 3**) at a depth below the original ground surface of c.0.70m. The excavation / reduction of Context 3 then continued until a final depth of c.3m. had been reached. A number of disarticulated and fragmentary human bones were recovered from contexts 1 and 2. However, careful archaeological investigation of the cutting failed to reveal any *in-situ* negative features, structures or artefacts.

8.0. CONCLUSIONS.

- 8.1. The groundworks subject to archaeological monitoring at All Saints Church, Herstmonceux exposed three unmarked brick vaults of uncertain date (**V1, V2, V3**). During the investigation, the corner of a lead coffin was observed through a hole in the roof of Vault 1 (**V1**) (see Section 7.1.5.). The presence within Vault 3 (**V3**) of at least one extant human skeleton was also confirmed (see Section 7.1.7.). The contents of the undamaged and thus still sealed Vault 2 (**V2**) were not ascertained (see Section 7.1.6.).
- 8.2. A small assemblage of displaced, disarticulated and fragmentary human bone indicative of earlier graveyard disturbance was also recovered from the excavated deposits (**contexts 1, 2**) (see sections 7.1.3. and 7.2.1.). The number of individuals represented within this collection, their respective ages at death, sex and pathology has not been established by specialist osteological analysis. Instead, it is intended that in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (see Section 1.4.) the bones will simply be returned to the church for re-burial.
- 8.3. No other cut features, structures or deposits of archaeological significance were discovered during the watching brief. It should also be noted that not one context of palaeoenvironmental potential was recorded.
- 8.4. No fresh information concerning the early history of All Saints Church or evidence for the postulated medieval occupation of the immediate area (see sections 3.3. and 6.1.6.) was therefore uncovered as a result of the project.
- 8.5. Even so, it is believed that the investigative methodology employed by C. G. Archaeology satisfied the primary objectives of the investigation defined in Section 4.0.

- 8.6. Any future groundworks undertaken within the cemetery of All Saints Church will almost certainly disturb disarticulated human remains. The exposure of more unmarked *in-situ* funerary monuments, especially in the immediate vicinity of the church, should also be considered.

9.0. ARCHIVE.

- 9.1. 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 with the retained artefact assemblage in a suitable local museum or similar repository approved by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and East Sussex County Council Archaeologist. All skeletal remains are to be returned to the church for re-interment.

10.0. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

- 10.1. C. G. Archaeology would like to thank Casper Johnson and Greg Chuter of East Sussex County Council, Vivienne Coad the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor and Peter Pritchett of John D. Clarke and Partners (Chartered Architects) for their assistance during the project. Figure 2 is based upon a plan drawn – up and supplied to C. G. Archaeology by John D. Clarke and Partners.

11.0. REFERENCE.

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

HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET.

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Site Code. | ASH 07 | | | | | |
| Site identification and address. | All Saints Church, Church Road, Herstmonceux | | | | | |
| County, district and / or borough. | East Sussex | | | | | |
| O.S. grid ref. | TQ 64275 10175 | | | | | |
| Geology. | Tunbridge Wells Sand | | | | | |
| Project number. | 07 / 8 | | | | | |
| Fieldwork type. | Eval. | Excav. | W.Brief. | Survey. | Other. | |
| | | | X | | | |
| Site type. | Rural. | Urban. | Other. Churchyard | | | |
| Date of fieldwork. | 15 th – 19 th October 2007 | | | | | |
| 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 | Disarticulated human remains | | |
| Project Summary. | | | | | | |
| <p>An archaeological watching brief was maintained on the cutting of a new drainage / fuel - line trench and cesspool tank at All Saints Church, Church Road, Herstmonceux. The groundworks subject to archaeological monitoring exposed three unmarked brick vaults of uncertain date. The corner of a lead coffin was observed through a small hole in the roof of Vault 1. The presence within Vault 3 of at least one extant human skeleton was also confirmed. The contents of the undamaged and thus still sealed Vault 2 were not ascertained. A modest number of disarticulated human bones, one segment of Post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem, an iron coffin handle and an iron nail were also gleaned from the excavated deposits. All of the recovered human skeletal remains are to be returned to the church for re-interment.</p> | | | | | | |

