



Croxdale Medieval Chapel

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Croxdale Chapel

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Purpose of document

This document has been prepared as an Archaeological Watching Brief Report for JABA Architect Ltd, Historic England (HE) and Durham County Council Archaeology Section (DCCAS). The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive account of the watching brief at Croxdale Medieval Chapel, Croxdale Village, County Durham.

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Project summary

OASIS ID	digventu1-501614
DV project code and type	CMC21 Watching Brief
National Grid Reference	NZ 2740237914
County	Durham
Designations	Listed Building (Grade I) – Disused chapel: 1120740 Listed Building (Grade II) – Cross shaft base: 1120741 Scheduled Monument: List entry 1019820
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Acknowledgements

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The fieldwork was undertaken by Ben Swain, the project was managed for DigVentures by Stuart Noon, with Lisa Westcott Wilkins in the role of Project Executive.



Executive summary

DigVentures Ltd was appointed by JABA Architect Ltd (hereafter 'the Client') to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Croxdale Medieval Chapel, Croxdale, County Durham (hereafter "the Site") on 5th May 2021. Under the management of Philip Harrison, P&A Harrison Builders Ltd, minor drainage works were undertaken to the north and south of the chancel. The area of works was within the area of the Scheduled Monument of Croxdale Medieval Chapel and Churchyard Cross Base (HE List Entry No. 1019820) for which permission was requested and provided by the Secretary of State (SMC ref number S00241001). All works were undertaken according to specifications outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation provided by DigVentures and the requirements of Durham County Council Archaeology Section and Historic England (Noon and Jago 2021).

Results Summary

Monitoring of the groundworks revealed no significant archaeological finds or features. A shallow deposit of small-to-medium sized rounded stones was observed near to the chapel walls positioned below the lead waterspouts built into the walls above. This likely represented a modern drainage feature. The site yielded a common stratigraphic sequence of topsoil, subsoil and the natural horizon was encountered at a maximum depth of 0.50m. Finds of plastic wrappers, shards of glass, a roof tile, animal bone and sherds of pottery were present in some of the observed deposits. All of which are considered to be post-medieval or modern in date. No archaeological features were identified linked to the medieval chapel.

The absence of any significant features may be because of the limited extent and depth of the excavations themselves. No evidence of the medieval chapel or associated activity was encountered but this does not discount the possibility that features associated with medieval occupation are located in the area. No further works are recommended, subject to approval by Historic England and Durham County Council Archaeology Section.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 DigVentures Ltd was appointed by JABA Architect Ltd (hereafter 'the Client') to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Croxdale Medieval Chapel, Croxdale, County Durham (hereafter "the Site") (Figure 1). Under the management of Philip Harrison, P&A Harrison Builders Ltd, minor drainage works were undertaken to the north and south of the chancel, designed to drain water from lead spouts eastward following a gradient away from the building (Figure 2).
- 1.1.2 The site is a Scheduled Monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (Historic England List Entry No. 1019820). Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) was provided in advance of the works by the Secretary of State at Department of Culture Media and Sport (Reference No. S00241001). The area of works was within the boundary of the Scheduled Monument of Croxdale Medieval Chapel and Cross Shaft base (HE List Entry No. 1019820).
- 1.1.3 All works were undertaken according to specifications outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation provided by DigVentures and the requirements of Historic England and DCCAS (Noon and Jago 2021).

1.2 Scope of document

- 1.2.1 This report summarises the aims and objectives of the archaeological watching brief, sets out the strategy and methodology by which the fieldwork was delivered and presents the findings of the investigation. In format and content, it conforms with current best practice and to the guidance outlined the Management of Archaeological Research Projects in the Historic Environment (Historic England 2015a), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (2014) and the North East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Petts and Gerrard 2006). Draft Resource Assessments (NERFF 2020), and Standards for Archaeological Work in County Durham and Darlington (DCCAS 2019).

1.3 Dissemination

- 1.3.1 Copies of this report will be distributed to the client, Historic England and the Durham County Council Historic Environment Record (HER), and a digital copy will be uploaded to the OASIS (digventu1-501604).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location, geology and background

2.1.1 The site lies at grid reference NZ 2740237914 and is situated in the village of Croxdale, in the Civil Parish of Croxdale and Hett, about 4.8km south of Durham City in County Durham on the A167 road formerly part of the Great North Road (Figure 1). The area of works was located around the north and south of the chancel of the church and an area to the east all within the scheduled monument (Figure 2).

2.1.2 The monument lies within an area of sedimentary bedrock of the Pennine Middle Coal Measures Formation formed between 318 and 309.5 million years ago during the Carboniferous period. The bedrock constituents vary from interbedded grey mudstone, siltstone, pale grey sandstone and commonly coal seams, with a bed of mudstone containing marine fossils at the base, and several such marine fossil-bearing mudstones in the upper half of the unit. The superficial geology comprises of Devensian Till. Sedimentary superficial deposit formed between 116 and 11.8 thousand years ago during the Quaternary period (BGS, <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk>).

2.2 Historic Background

2.2.1 The following description is taken from the HE List Entry for the Scheduled Monument: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1019820>

2.2.2 Croxdale Medieval Church is the focus of historic and archaeological interest. It is the site of a medieval chapel and the socket stone of a churchyard cross, situated 50m north east of Croxdale Hall. Croxdale chapel, now known as Old Croxdale chapel, was dedicated to St Bartholomew. It was formerly a dependent chapel of St Oswald's Church, Durham. The earliest fabric of the chapel has been dated to the late 11th century or early 12th century. The church was sold to the Salvin family in 1845-6 in exchange for land to build a new church at Sunderland Bridge. Since this time the churchyard has been used as a family burial ground. The medieval chapel, which is Listed Grade I, comprises a nave and chancel. The nave measures 11.6m long by 7m wide externally. The walls are constructed of roughly coursed rubble sandstone blocks and are 4m high. The south wall has a 19th century window with a four-centred arch, a blocked window and a 12th century doorway with semi-circular tympanum above. The door is original and has two iron 'C'-shaped hinges and a central iron cross. The tympanum, which bears a carving of the Tree of Life, rest on two 0.8m long stones (known as impost) in the walls either side of the doorway. The west wall has a single light lancet window with a cusped head, two blocked lancet windows and a bellcote above the roof apex which has two pointed openings; one still retains a bell. The north front has a blocked doorway. The roof of the nave is pitched and is pantiled with a verge of stone slabs. The gables of the roof are stone coped. The chancel, which measures 7.7m long by 5m wide, has a 19th century four-centred arch window on the south side, a 14th century Decorated Style three light window in the east wall and a brick stack abutting the north side. The chancel is butt jointed to the nave, indicating it was built later than the nave. A low parapet with chamfered coping has added 0.5m to the height of the chancel walls and hides a low pitched roof which drains via four drainage spouts, two in the north and two in the south chancel wall. The interior of the nave walls are plastered and limewashed, with a wooden dado. The floor is of limestone slabs which to the west of the south door extend the full width of the nave



and to the east of the doorway form a central aisle with the remainder boarded. In the south wall the window bay of a blocked window is visible. The east wall has a string course at 1.45m high, with a lower chamfer and there is a late 12th century chancel arch supported on keeled responds with moulded bases and capitals. The walls of the chancel are also plastered and limewashed and the floor is also of limestone slabs. Three plaques (two from the 19th century and one from the 20th century) are attached to the north wall. The east wall has a stone altar supported on columns of Frosterley marble and to the north a stone ledge built into the wall with chamfered lower edges. The south wall has an aumbry, a cupboard recessed into the wall for the storage of the altar plate and other sacred items. The churchyard cross is situated 5m to the south of the chancel of the medieval chapel. It includes a sandstone socket stone, which is Listed Grade II, and measures 0.7m square and 0.36m high. The top edge is chamfered. A modern shaft and cross, dating from 1978, has been inserted into the socket and obscures the socket's dimensions. The 20th century cross and shaft are excluded from the scheduling, although the socket stone and the ground beneath are included (Historic England, List Entry 1019820).

2.3 North-East Regional Research Framework

- 2.3.1 The watching brief at Croxdale Chapel held some potential to address several of the research themes and questions posed in the North-East Regional Research Framework (NERRF, Petts and Gerrard 2006), as well as those raised more recently as a result of developer-led archaeology. Investigation had the potential to address some of the following themes highlighted within the NERRF:
- 2.3.2 Chronology-establishing chronologies for human activity in the past remains one of the most critical aspects of archaeological research. This is highlighted in each of the cultural periods defined in the NERRF (Petts and Gerrard 2006).
- 2.3.3 Early religion ecclesiastical structures – Christianity is a major research topic in the study of the early medieval North-East. Religious belief and ritual activity permeated all aspects of life in the historic North-East, that continues to resonate strongly. There is a huge potential for the future study of the early medieval period in the region and in particular further research is needed into the layout of ecclesiastical sites, and their impact in the wider landscape (Petts and Gerrard 2006, 155, 161, 227-228).
- 2.3.4 The church and religious belief - the Saxo-Norman transition was an important period for church architecture and the precise chronology of the Saxo-Norman overlap remains uncertain. Excavation on church sites is limited by the fact that many are still in use as places of worship although some work has been undertaken. Some archaeological work has also taken place on churches which have fallen into disuse. Wider patterns of ecclesiastical organisation are not well understood. The development of parochial structures and the role of more minor chapels-of-ease requires further clarification (ibid, 80, 82,165-166).

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Watching brief

3.1.1 The principal aim of the watching brief was to provide further information concerning the presence/absence, date, nature and extent of any buried archaeological remains and to investigate and record any archaeological remains within the area of the groundworks. This included:

- Verifying the archaeological potential of the site.
- Identifying the potential for remains not anticipated by previous research or record.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1.1 The work was undertaken on 5th May 2021 by Ben Swain on behalf of DigVentures. An archaeological presence was maintained during all groundwork on the Site. All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the WSI provided by DigVentures and the requirements of Historic England and DCCAS (Noon and Jago 2021). The Client provided reasonable access in order that all features and deposits revealed during groundwork could be fully investigated and recorded appropriately.

4.1.2 Minor works, comprising the excavation of a system of channels for the laying of drainage pipes, was completed using a mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. These channels measured between 1.80m and 8.00m in length and between 0.30m and 0.50m in depth. All channels were constructed to a width of 0.40m, according to the size of the bucket used by the mechanical excavator.

4.1.3 All work was completed under strict archaeological observation, with regular stops to enable examination of the exposed deposits. The methodology was designed to allow a sufficient sample of each feature type/deposit to be examined in order to establish the nature, extent and condition of the archaeological remains.

4.1.4 All recording was undertaken using DigVentures pro forma recording system, supported by a digital photographic record conforming to standards outlined by Historic England (2015b).

5 RESULTS

5.1.1 Excavation revealed a common stratigraphic sequence consisting of a dark greyish brown sandy silt topsoil with occasional small and medium sized sub-rounded stones to a maximum thickness of 0.15m (1001). Underneath this was a layer of mid yellowish grey silty clay (subsoil) with occasional small to medium sized sub-angular sandstone fragments, with charcoal and mortar flecks (1002) to a maximum thickness of 0.30m. In areas of work further away from the chapel to the east, the natural horizon (1004) was encountered at a depth of 0.35m and excavated to a final depth of 0.50m with the maximum thickness being 0.15m. (Figure 3)



5.1.2 Close to the chapel itself and below each of the lead waterspouts built into the walls above, a localized purposefully laid concentration deposit of well sorted tightly packed small to medium sized rounded stones (1003) was observed, measuring 0.55m in length and 0.35m thick to the limit of excavation. This deposit likely represents a relatively modern rudimentary drainage aid or primitively constructed soak-away for the waterspouts above.

5.2 Archaeological finds

5.2.1 A small quantity of finds material was recovered from the topsoil layer (1001) and subsoil layer (1002) during removal. Material likely dating from the late 19th century to the present day was encountered in layer (1001) including plastic wrappers, glass shards, roof tile and small sherds of pottery. In addition, two pieces of probable animal bone were recovered from layer (1002). The finds confirm the relatively modern date of the topsoil and subsoil layer and do not contribute further to the research aims and objectives identified. The finds were observed on site and not retained.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1.1 This report constitutes compliance with Historic England's recommendations for archaeological observation during groundworks consisting of the construction of minor drainage to the north and south of Croxdale medieval chapel's chancel.

6.1.2 Monitoring of the groundworks revealed no significant archaeological finds or features. A small, concentrated deposit of rounded stones close to the chapel, below lead waterspouts built into the walls above, was interpreted as a relatively modern rudimentary drainage aid. Finds such as plastic wrappers, glass, animal bone and 19th to 20th century pottery confirm that the deposits excavated were relatively modern in date. No archaeological remains were identified linked to the Medieval Chapel.

6.1.3 The absence of any significant archaeological features may be because of the limited extent of the excavations themselves. No evidence of the medieval chapel or associated activity was encountered, although due to the limited extent of the excavations it does not discount the possibility that features associated with medieval occupation are located in the area. Subject to approval by Historic England's (HE) Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Lee McFarlane and Durham County Council's Archaeology Service (DCCAS), no further works are recommended.

7 RECOMMENDATION AND ARCHIVE

7.1 Preparation and deposition

7.1.1 As no finds or significant features from archaeological deposits were observed during the watching brief, no physical archive (aside from the information detailed in full in this report) was produced. The project archive, consisting of this report and associated digitised records, will be uploaded to OASIS. A digital and hard copy of this report has been sent to the Client, Historic England and the DCC HER. This report will be appended to the OASIS record. Subject to approval by Durham County Council's Archaeology Service (DCCAS) and Historic England, given the absence of archaeological remains, no further works are recommended.



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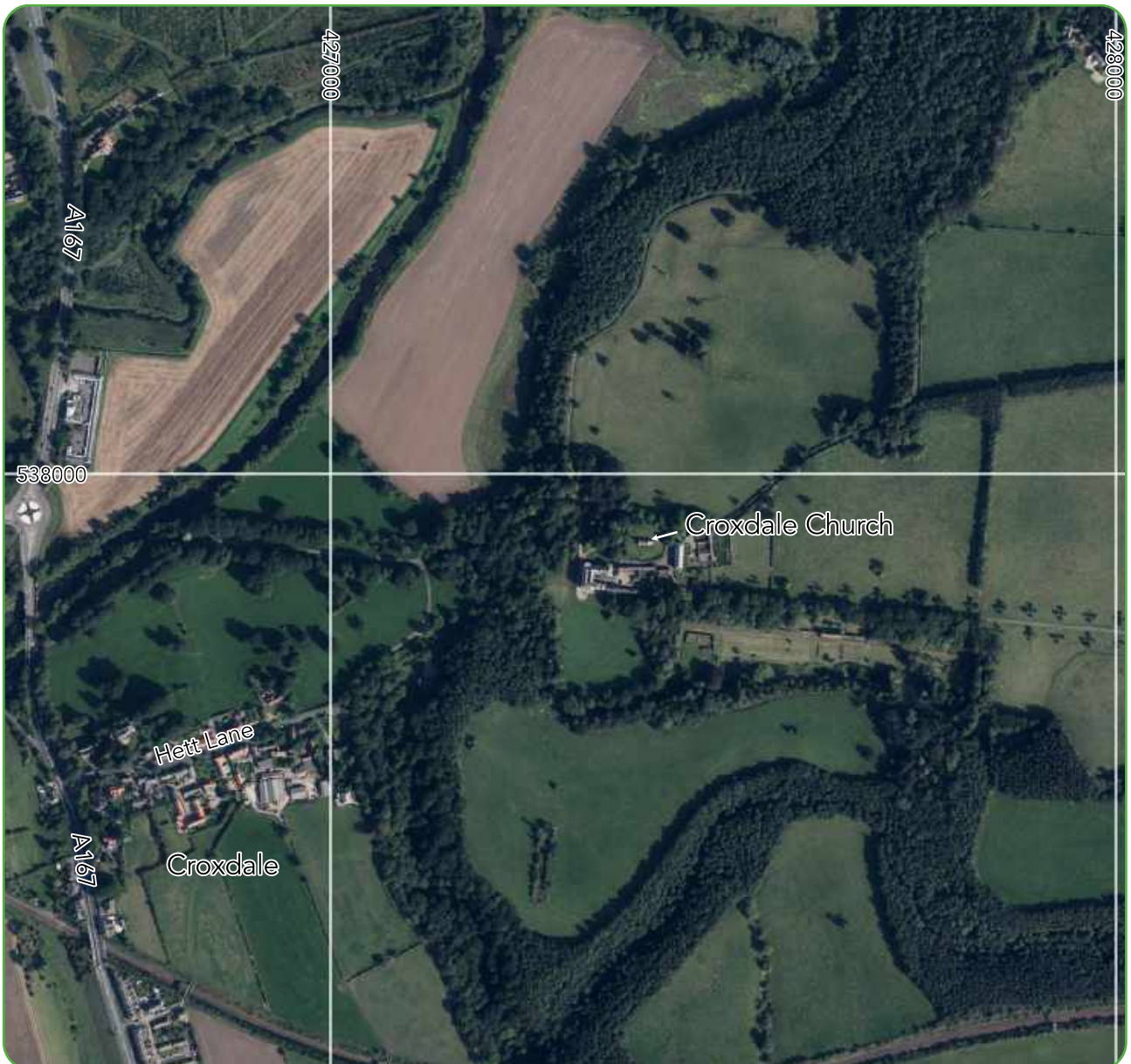


Figure 1: Site location

Key

- Location of Works
- Scheduled Monument

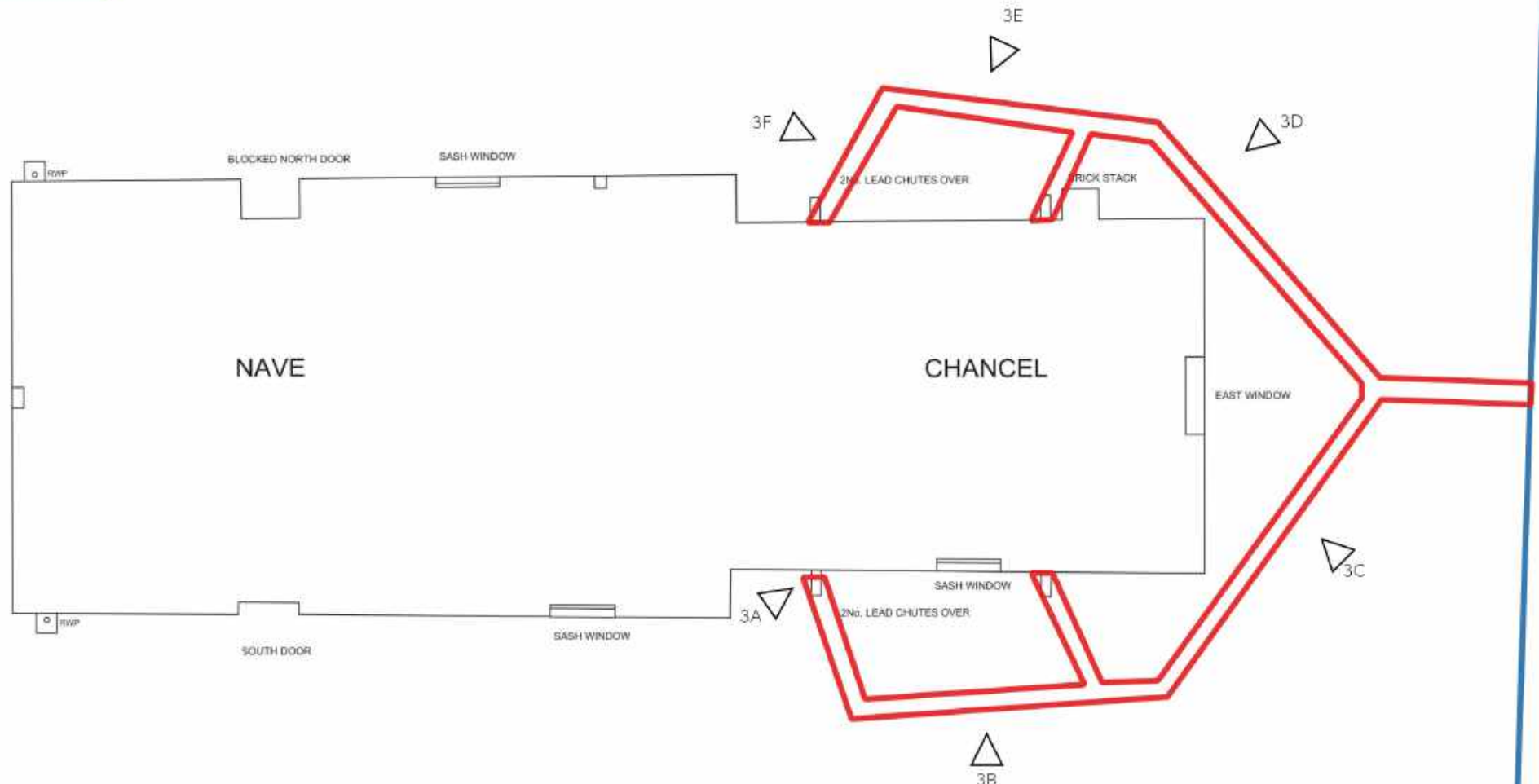


Figure 2. Plan showing the location of minor drainage works to the north and south of Croxdale Chapel



3A



3B



3C

Figure 3. Representative photographs of excavation areas (location and direction indicated on Figure 2)



3D



3E



3F

Figure 3. Representative photographs of excavation areas continued (location and direction indicated on Figure 2)

APPENDIX 1 - CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Table 1: Contexts

Context	Description	Interpretation/ Process of deposition	Dimensions (m)	
1001	Moderately loose, dark greyish brown sandy silt with occasional 5-10% inclusions of small and medium sized sub-rounded stones with finds of plastic, glass, roof tile and pottery	Topsoil	Length	1.80m-8.00m
			Width	0.40m
			Thickness	0.15m
1002	Moderately firm, mid yellowish grey silty clay with occasional small to medium sized sub-angular sandstone fragments, with charcoal and mortar flecks with inclusions of animal bone.	Subsoil	Length	1.80m-8.00m
			Width	0.40m
			Thickness	0.30m
1003	Deposit of small and medium sized sub-rounded stones well sorted and tightly packed.	Small rudimentary drainage aid/soak-away for lead waterspouts built into the chapel walls above.	Length	0.55m
			Width	0.40m
			Thickness	0.35m
1004	Moderately compacted, light greyish yellow clay	Natural	Length	1.80m-8.00m
			Width	0.40m
			Thickness	0.15m to LOE