



Land adjoining

St James's Church

High Street, Saul, Gloucestershire

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Archaeological evaluation

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one ten archaeology

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Front cover; evaluation trench, from the north-west

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out during January 2017 at land adjoining St James's Church, High Street, Saul, Gloucestershire as part of a proposal to create an extension of the existing churchyard for the internment of cremations.

The evaluation identified three truncated undated features of potential archaeological significance cut into the surface of the natural gravel at a depth varying between 0.50-0.70m below the existing ground level. This variation may be explained by the former presence of agricultural earthworks (ridge and furrow cultivation) as evidenced by the undulations in the surface of the natural gravel. Two of the features comprised ditches of unknown date that may form part of the early settlement landscape at Saul. The third, which seemed slightly curved with a shallow rounded terminus at one end, differed in fill and remains an anomaly.

Although undated, if the truncation of these features can be attributed to the effects of ridge and furrow cultivation rather than something more recent, it would suggest that they are likely to at least pre-date the post-medieval period.

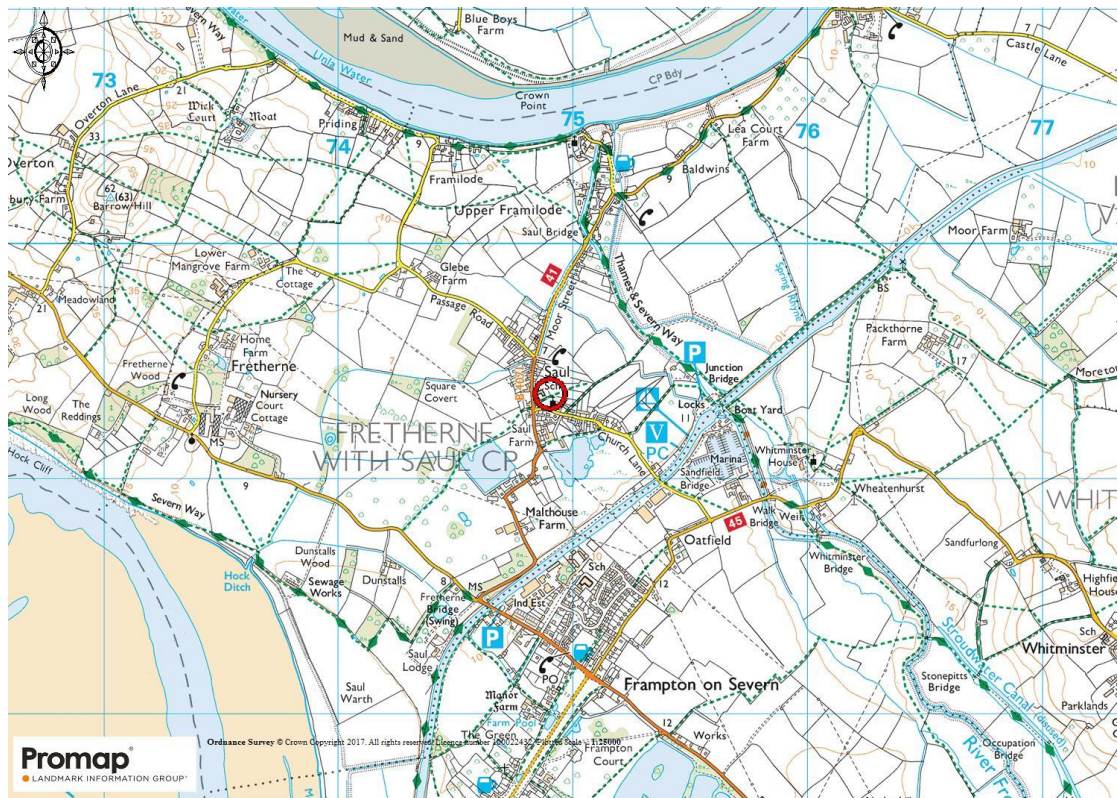


Fig. 1; site location (circled in red)



Fig. 2; study site (outlined in red)

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of work (Figs. 1, 2 & 3)

This document details the results of an archaeological evaluation during 16th-18th January at land adjoining St James's Church, High Street, Saul, Gloucestershire, GL27JY on behalf of Saul Parish Council. The request for the trial trenching by the Archaeologist at Glos. County Council, is a response to a proposal (planning ref; S.15/2183/FUL) for the extension of existing churchyard for the internment of cremations. It was recognised that the proposed change of use of the land would require ground intrusions which may have an unacceptably adverse impact on any archaeological remains that may be present. Therefore, in accordance with the NPPF, paragraph 128, it was recommended that in advance of the determination of this planning application that the applicant should provide the results of a field evaluation. This will describe the significance of any archaeological remains within the application site and how these would be affected by the proposed development so that an appropriate mitigation strategy can be implemented.

Geology and topography

Saul is a village in the parish of Fretherne with Saul in the district of Stroud, Gloucestershire lying eight miles south-west of Gloucester near a bend on the River Severn. The land is flat and low lying, rising at the western edge to only a little above the 15m contour. It is drained by the River Frome, one arm of which marks the north-east boundary of Saul, and by a small stream flowing into the Severn on the south-west side.

The study site lies within the village of Saul and is represented by a rectangular plot of land amounting to approximately 870m² which extends on a north-west to south-east alignment from the northern edge of the boundary wall to St. James's Church.

The underlying geology of the site comprises sand and gravel of the Third (Main) Terrace of River Severn (BGS, 1972). This was confirmed during the excavation. The height of ground level at the trench site was about 7m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).

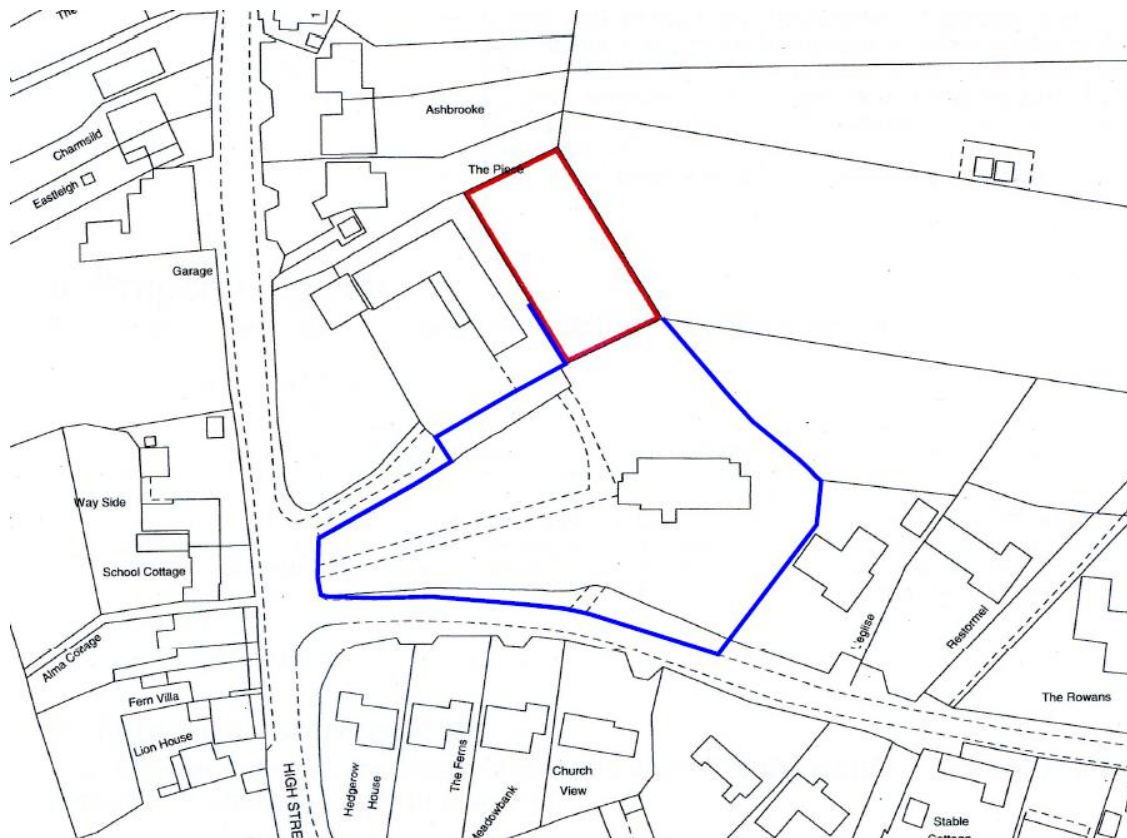


Fig. 3; existing cemetery (blue), proposed extension (red)

Archaeological and historical background

The Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted within a 500km search area centred on the site. A summary of the more significant information is outlined below.

HER 8385; Anglican parish church.

Said to date from 1140, part of chancel is possibly 14th century, the tower and nave windows are of late 15th early 16th century.

HER 9645; Benhall deserted medieval settlement

Benhall, which stood west of the cross at the junction of the roads from Fretherne and from Saul to Lower Framilode. There was a habitation at Benhall by 1269 and there may have been more than one house there in 1338.

HER 11154; 18th century Stroudwater canal.

The Stroudwater Canal was promoted by clothiers in the Stroud valley to obtain coal more cheaply than by road. It was completed in 1779.

HER 11157; the Gloucester and Sharpness canal.

Formerly the Berkeley Canal. Surveys for a canal to bypass the twisting estuary were made by Robert Whitworth in 1784. Work began in 1794. Underestimated costs and unsatisfactory engineers delayed completion till 1827 when, for reasons of economy, the canal was shortened to enter the river at Sharpness rather than at Berkeley Pill. The canal company had to arrange for a "level crossing" with the Stroudwater Canal at Saul (HER 11154).

HER 12306; course of Roman road.

Margary's RR 543 is said to extend from a river crossing of the Severn at Arlingham through Frampton, Eastington, Frocester and Kingscote to join the Foss Way. No trace of it was observed during M5 construction.

HER 20467; Saul Church of England Primary School, Fretherne with Saul.

Negative archaeological watching brief (Goult, 1999).

HER 21032; An archaeological desk based assessment

The study shows that the embankment of the Gloucester and Sharpness canal is recorded within the survey area, and that ridge and furrow earthworks of probable medieval origin survive in good condition to the east of Walk Farm, and in poor condition to the west of the farm. The proximity of finds of Romano-British origin and of evidence for medieval settlement and agriculture, suggests that the presence of other finds or features surviving undetected within the study area cannot be entirely discounted (Beamish, 1996).

HER 21235; archaeological evaluation and watching brief on land adjacent to Church Cottage, Church Lane, Saul, Fretherne with Saul

Natural gravel deposits were recorded at an average depth of 7.39m AOD. Three features were recorded cutting the natural gravel in the foundation trench for the new dwelling. An undated 'U'-shaped linear feature, interpreted as a ditch, was recorded in the south-west of the trench. Two undated sub-oval features were recorded, which have been interpreted as a possible pit and posthole. Two undated pits were also recorded in the west and north-east of the trench. The features were overlain by a post-medieval levelling deposit, which was cut by a large post-medieval pit in the west of the trench. The natural gravel was cut by a post-medieval pit in the foundation trench for the garage. Both post-medieval pits were sealed by topsoil (Barrett, 2002a & 2002b).

HER 21937; negative archaeological watching brief at Church View, Church Lane, Saul, Fretherne with Saul.

Natural gravel was recorded between 0.3m and 0.4m below ground level, sealed by topsoil. Modern disturbance and drains were recorded to the immediate south and east of the existing house and former garage. No archaeological features deposits or finds were recorded (Nichols, 2002).

HER 22019; negative watching brief at St. James' Church, Saul, Fretherne with Saul.

No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded (Morris, 2005).

HER 28743; Evaluation on land at Walk Farm, Wheatenhurst, Frampton on Severn.

Fourteen trenches were excavated. Several geological palaeochannels and patches of root action as well as substantial alluvial gravel layers and redeposited material associated with the canal were recorded (Evans, 2006).

HER 29653; evaluation at Wayside, Saul. Fretherne with Saul.

Possible furrow recorded. No other finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded (Williams, 2007).

HER 32487; Site of village pound, Saul

HER 36343; Post-medieval land reclamation

Ridge and furrow can be clearly identified across much of the modern-day field system; however, the relatively limited increase in elevation of the land surface in comparison to the active marsh has been viewed as a possible indicator of the feature's origin during the post-medieval period. Documentary sources provide further support for a later date with reclamation being stated to have taken place by the mid-18th century

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Aims of the work

The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the date, character, quality, survival and extent of the archaeological deposits within the application area likely to be threatened by the proposed development in order that an informed decision on their importance in a local, regional and national context can be made. This information will clarify whether any remains should be considered for preservation *in situ*, or form the basis of a mitigation strategy.

Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised a single 23m x 1.5m linear machine excavated trench aligned north-south diagonally across the centre of the study site.

Fieldwork methods and recording

The archaeological field work and post-excavation was carried out in accordance with standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluations produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2014). All deposits were excavated removing the overburden under close archaeological supervision and investigated for archaeological features which then sampled by hand excavation. Plans and sample sections of the trenches were made and recorded during the excavation.

RESULTS: GENERAL

Soil and ground conditions

Conditions were generally dry during excavation, but the deposits showed a good level of moisture retention. Below the surface of gravel deposit 102 was the natural water table. This meant that when the features were excavated they quickly became inundated with water. Where excavation went slightly lower in the central area of the trench, in the position of fill deposit 105, the water inundation was greater making hand excavation difficult.

Reliability of field investigation

There was no evidence to suggest truncation of the underlying deposits through modern disturbance indicating perhaps that deposits survive relatively intact across the site. However, the shallow nature of the infilled cut features exposed within the surface of the natural gravel, suggests a level of truncation that can probably be attributed to later a period of cultivation (ploughing). Faint traces of this can be seen in the adjacent field to the east which has been mapped from aerial photographs.

Distribution of archaeological deposits

The natural substrate was reached throughout the length of the excavated trench and within the surface of this deposit three cut features were recorded. None of the fills produced finds and all three remain undated. They were sealed by a thick layer of relict subsoil probably associated with an earlier period of cultivation This was in turn sealed by a thick layer of modern topsoil.

Presentation of results

The results of the excavation (below) are described from the earliest to the latest deposits. The trench was attributed context numbers with a numerical value equivalent to the number of the trench.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS (Fig. 4)

THE TRENCH

Context 102 (natural geology)

The surface of the natural substrate (noticeably undulating), comprising a yellowish-brown sandy-gravel, was exposed throughout the length of the trench. At the north end the gravel was recorded at a height of approx. 7.07m AOD and at the south end 7.20m AOD. Three cut features (104, 106 & 108) were recorded within the surface of this deposit (see below).

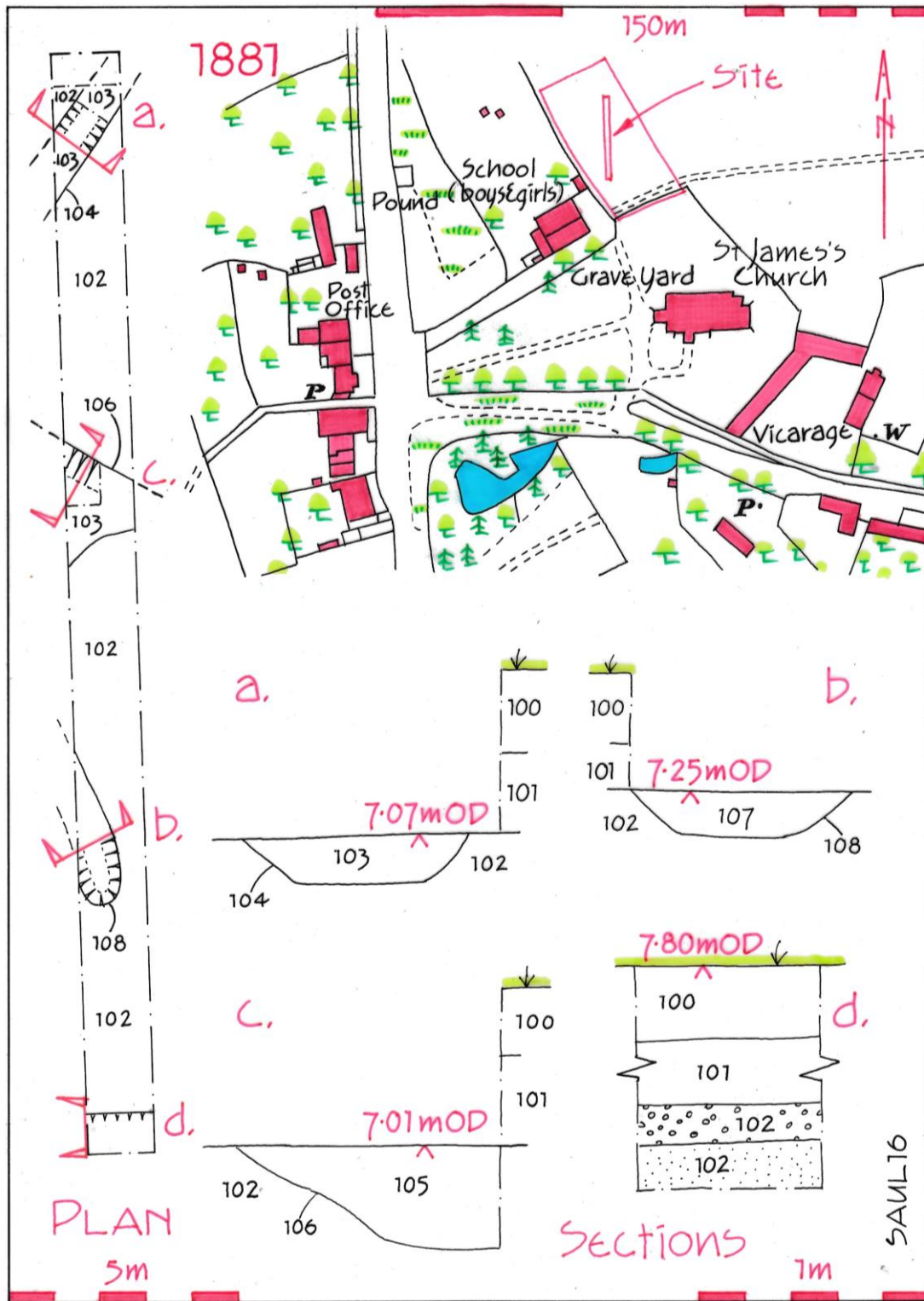


Fig. 4; showing trench location, trench plan & sections

Context 104 (?ditch) filled by 103

Situated at the north end of the trench and orientated north-east to south-west was a shallow (truncated) flat-bottomed ditch (104) 0.22m deep with sloping sides and about 1m wide. It was filled by a single undated deposit (103) comprising a mid-greyish-brown sandy-silt.

Context 106 (?ditch) filled by 105

Situated within the central area of the trench and orientated east-west was a probable truncated ditch feature (106). The feature was partly excavated, removing half of the single fill deposit (105) along its widest axis revealing a sloping side and flat bottom to a depth of about 0.42m. The fill deposit (105) comprising in plan, a funnel-shaped feature consisted of a mid-greyish-brown sandy-silt, equivalent to fill deposit 103 and was similarly undated.

Context 108 (?ditch) filled by 107

Situated towards the south end of the trench was a shallow truncated almost linear ditch-like feature. The north-west end continued beyond the trench whilst the remaining length which was exposed within the trench, suggests a slight curve towards the south. Sample excavation of this feature revealed a width of 0.96m and a depth of 0.20m rising towards the surface of the gravel where it ended rounded terminus. It was filled by a single undated deposit (107) comprising an orangey-brown sandy-silt.

Context 101 (relict subsoil) & Context 100 (modern topsoil)

Overlying the natural gravel and sealing the three fill deposits to a depth of about 0.30-35m was a relict subsoil deposit comprising a mid-yellowish-brown sandy-silt with a component of small rounded pebbles. The occasional brick fragment was observed at the interface between this deposit and the overlying topsoil layer 100, consisting of a dark greyish-brown loam with considerable root penetration.



Plate 1; Fill deposit 103, from the north-east



Plate 2; cut feature 104, from the north-east



Plate 3; section 1a, detail, also showing overlying layers 101 and 100



Plate 4; Section 1d



Plate 5; fill deposit 105, from the north



Plate 5; cut feature 106 (partially excavated), from the south-east



Plate 6; fill deposit 107, from the north-east



Plate 7; cut feature 108, from the south-east



Plate 7; section 1c

FINDS

No finds were made during the evaluation apart from the occasional small fragment of brick from the topsoil layer (100). These were not retained.

Environmental data

None of the deposits exposed during the excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

DISCUSSION

Historic mapping (OS 1881) shows Saul village as a small ribbon-like settlement focused along the junction of the High Street and Church Lane, the main route-ways through the village connecting it with villages to the east and those to the north and south. There is no firm evidence of an early nucleated settlement at Saul, but its position is thought likely be to focused around an area of gravel (BGS, 1972) and the church which was established by the 11th century. Archaeological work around this area has been mostly negative, but excavation

(HER 21235) on land adjacent to Church Cottage, Church Lane (Barrett, 2002) revealed a series of undated features suggesting perhaps early settlement to the south of the church and east of Saul Farm. The farm which appears to have undergone substantial enlargement between 1881 and 1905 was the chief house of Saul manor. West of the church on the corner of the road junction was a small green, inclosed in 1843 and which included a pound. The church house, documented in 1547, may have been on the green (VCH, 1972).

The study site occupies an area east of the former school and north of the church formerly the south-east corner of a larger field. The school was demolished by 1975 to be replaced by a newer school which itself was removed to make way for a detached dwelling under construction at the time of the survey.

The field evaluation revealed three undated features sealed beneath a layer of relict subsoil and existing topsoil amounting to a combined depth of 0.50-60m in the south half of the trench increasing to a thickness of 0.70m in the northern length (see Fig. 4; sections 1a-d). Two of these features 104 and 106 appear to represent former ditches and one of these (104) is aligned north-east to south-west, interestingly on the same alignment as the north and south boundaries of the study site, the south side formed by the existing churchyard wall. The other feature, in which the form of the fill is funnel shaped, begins at a width of 1m on the east side of the trench widening to over 2m on the west side. Partial excavation revealed a probable ditch, but could not confirm its full width and whether the shape of the fill represented an increase in the width of the ditch or a fork leading into two ditches continuing to the north-west and south-west. The adjacent land to the west (former school site) was the subject of a watching brief which proved negative (Goult, 1999) with no evidence to suggest that these features or ones similar extend west into this area. The fills of ditches 104 and 106 were very similar indicating perhaps features of a similar function and date. The fill of cut feature 108 was however, noticeably different in both colour and texture, but its slightly curved nature and neat profile with a shallow rounded terminus at one end, may be of significance.

Undulation in the surface of the natural gravel (102) aligned roughly east-west may correspond with former agricultural earthworks (ridge and furrow). Similar earthworks are recorded (HER) in the field to the east.

Summary of results

The evaluation identified three undated cut features at about 0.50-70m below ground level. Two of these (104 & 106), shared equivalent fill deposits and appear to represent former field boundary/drainage ditches. The third feature, which seemed slightly curved with a shallow rounded terminus at one end, differed in fill and remains an anomaly.

Significance

Although undated, the evaluation has shown that truncated deposits of potential archaeological significance survive cut into the surface of the natural gravel beneath a homogenous site overburden to an overall depth of depth 0.70m within the north half of the trench and 0.50-60m in the remaining length. This variation may be explained by the former presence of agricultural earthworks (ridge and furrow cultivation) as evidenced by the undulations in the surface of the natural gravel. Two of the features comprised ditches of unknown date that may form part of the early settlement at Saul. If truncation of these features can be attributed to the effects of ridge and furrow cultivation, this would suggest that they are likely to pre-date the post-medieval period.

Impact of development

The results of the trial trenching suggest that the proposed internments, anticipated at a maximum depth of 0.45m below existing ground level, will impact on an archaeological overburden comprising initially of a relict subsoil layer overlain by the existing topsoil to a depth varying between 0.50m-70m throughout the site.

Archive Location

The digital archive arising from the work will be deposited with OASIS at the Archaeology Data Service (ADS).

Digital archive:

Pdf report

X9 digital images

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OS 1881

OS 1905

OS 1922

OS 1975-77

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APPENDIX 1 OASIS

Project name	Land adjoining St James's Church, Saul, Gloucestershire; archaeological evaluation
Project dates	Start: 16-01-2017 End: 18-01-2017
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	SAUL16 – Site code
Any associated project reference codes	110archa1-274086 - OASIS form ID
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Conservation Area
Current Land use	Vacant Land 2 - Vacant land not previously developed
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Monument type	DITCH WITH TERMINUS Uncertain
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	""Targeted Trenches""
Development type	Amenity area (e.g. public open space)
Development type	cremation internments
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF
Position in the planning process	Between deposition of an application and determination
Country	England
Site location	GLOUCESTERSHIRE STROUD FRETHERNE WITH SAUL Land adjoining St. James's Church, High Street, Saul
Postcode	GL27JY
Study area	870 Square metres
Site coordinates	SO 74887 09367 51.781951452543 -2.364078652631 51 46 55 N 002 21 50 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 7.07m Max: 7.25m
Name of Organisation	one ten archaeology
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	one ten archaeology
Project director/manager	sean cook
Project supervisor	sean cook
Type of	Parish Council

sponsor/funding body	
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	OASIS
Digital Contents	"none"
Paper Archive recipient	county museum
Paper Media available	"Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Plan','Section"
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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