

# Report of Work under Archaeological Supervision and Control

## St Peter's Church, Sibton, Suffolk Drainage works (and other repairs)

SHER SBT 016

Prepared for Sibton PCC



Sarah Bates, Report no. 48  
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OASIS ID. sarahbat1-378184

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<b>Project name</b>	<b>St Peter's Church</b>
<b>Parish</b>	<b>Sibton</b>
<b>District</b>	<b>Suffolk Coastal</b>
<b>Grid reference</b>	<b>TM 3674 6954</b>
<b>SHER Ref.</b>	<b>SBT 016</b>
<b>Date of fieldwork</b>	<b>21st October 2019 2016</b>

## **Summary**

Archaeological monitoring during the installation of new rainwater gullies and a soakaway at St Peter's Church, Sibton resulted in largely negative results. A solid deposit of flint, tile and mortar may have been a footing of some kind but did not appear to be structural. Some tile fragments from the mortar deposit are of medieval and, possibly, late medieval date. Part of an iron coffin nail was found.

A few pieces of disarticulated human bone were found. They were reinterred by the contractor following consultation with the PCC and Vicar.

## **1.0 Introduction**

St Peter's Church (TM 3674 6954) is situated immediately south of the present A1120 road and at the north-east side of the small village of Sibton in the northern area of Suffolk Coastal district, just over 6km to the north of Saxmundham. Building and rainwater drainage improvements were being undertaken at the church by EFL Ltd contractors on behalf of Nicholas Warns Architect Ltd for Sibton PCC.

The work included installing two new downpipe gullies and a soakaway; one at the north-east corner of the chancel to drain into a new soakaway located just to the east, and another next to the west side buttress of the north aisle (Fig. 1). The latter replaced an existing water butt and was connected to existing ground drains. Other work included masonry repairs to the parapets at the east end of the chancel and vestry and north aisle, and cleaning of debris from the north aisle roof and gutters.

The archaeological work involved monitoring and recording during the groundworks for the new drains. (Fig. 1). This work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Sarah Bates following consultation Abby Antrobus (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service) and Bob Carr (Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich archaeological advisor). Sibton PCC funded the repairs, improvements and archaeological work.

On completion of the project the archaeological report and photographic record will be deposited with the Suffolk Historic Environment Record. An OASIS form is included below as Appendix 1.

## **2.0 Geology and topography**

The underlying solid geology of the area comprises Crag group sedimentary sand formed in shallow seas in the Quaternary and Neogene periods. This is overlaid by Lowestoft Formation sands and gravels of glacial origin created by meltwater and ice action. Soils are lime rich clayey loams (British Geological Survey 2019, Landis 2017).

The church is located to the south of, and about 200m from, the River Yox. An Ordnance Survey benchmark on the building is at 25.87m OD.

## **3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

A church is recorded in Sibton in the Domesday Survey of 1086. The present building comprises a nave with north aisle, chancel with north vestry, south porch and square west tower which, formerly, had a spire (removed in 1813 due to concerns about its weight and effect it may have upon the tower (Moore 1892)). There are late 12th-century south and north doorways (the former indicating the south wall of the nave has remained in the same position), a 13th-century arcade and the tower dates from c. 1400. The rest of the building is largely of 14th to 15th century date with restorations having occurred in the 19th century when the porch was built and the chancel rebuilt. It is thought that the 13th-century arcade with circular piers may have originated from the Cistercian Abbey the remains of which survive nearby (Suffolk County Council 2012). It has been suggested that the north doorway, within the 16th-century north aisle wall, also came from a demolished part of the Abbey (Moore 1892, 60). In recent years pews have been removed from the church and observations made during work in the nave and north aisle. Reports on archaeological recording at that time are referred to in the SHER but have not been accessed during preparing this report. However: *'Trial excavation at the west end of the nave to establish the likely medieval floor level and the degree of disturbance caused by Victorian alterations. Med floor levels probably disturbed, no sign of a formal floor level of formation deposit. Advice given on acceptable levels for disturbance by any future re-flooring or heating scheme. Report in Church file and correspondence. Trial excavation date 01/07/1998* (information from SHER provided by Abby Antrobus, October 2019). Further details and information about the history of the building is included in a booklet which is available in the church (Campbell 2015). Of note there is mention of the replacement of the medieval chancel in the 17th century by one of brick with timber windows. Thus the present chancel, rebuilt in 1872, represents its third incarnation.

The abbey, a few hundred metres away to the north-west, was founded in 1150 and was the only Cistercian house in Suffolk. It was sold to the Duke of Norfolk in 1536 and sold

again in the 17th century when a house was built from its remains (demolished in the late 18th century). A possible park, probably associated with the 17th-century house lies to the north of the modern A1120 road (Suffolk County Council 2012).

Part of the line of a Roman road runs along the north side of the churchyard and finds from the area of Sibton Park include a Bronze Age axe, a 6th-century brooch, a 10th-century silver penny, a Viking type pendant, a medieval astronomical instrument and other medieval finds from the abbey site. To the south-west of the church is the findspot of a gilded Saxon pin (Suffolk County Council 2012).

## 4.0 Methodology

Archaeological monitoring aimed to observe and record the presence or absence, location, nature and date of any surviving archaeological deposits within the areas affected by the drainage works.

The soakaway, gully and drain trenches were dug by machine by the site contractors.

The location and nature of the trenches was recorded (trenches were assigned context numbers for the recording purposes). Archaeological features/deposits were recorded using *pro forma* context sheets in the standard way. Digital photographs recorded the archaeological deposits and the work at the site generally.

Metal detecting of spoil and trench surfaces was undertaken. Finds of archaeological significance were retrieved.

No articulated skeletons were exposed and no deposits required sampling for environmental assessment.

Heavy rain occurred for much of the day spent on site and had some effect on the observations made (trench 2 became partly water-filled).

## 5.0 Results (Figs. 1 and 2, Plates 1-5)

Context numbers are shown in square brackets and listed in Appendix 2.

### **Trenches at north-east corner of chancel** (collectively recorded as Trench 1)

A trench for a new drain was dug from below the existing downpipe at the south-east corner of the north aisle (Fig. 1, Plate 1). It was 0.45m wide and 0.40-0.50m deep, sloping down slightly to the east and the trench for the new soakaway. Near the east end of the trench a large deposit of solid cream-coloured lime mortar with occasional flints and tile fragments was exposed [3] (Figs 1 and 2). Its south side was partly removed during the machine excavation of the trench but the mortar feature appeared to align with the church (but see below; Conclusions). The mortar survived in the bottom of the drain trench and in its south-facing section (Plates 2 and 3 respectively). Hand excavation showed that the bottom of the deposit was only just below the excavated trench base but sloped very slightly down to the east and was less well-defined at its east end where

it is possible that it may have been disturbed during machining. Several large pieces of tile of medieval or late medieval date were included with the mortar and appeared to lay horizontally in 'layers. The function or origin of the mortar deposit is unknown and the apparent 'layering' of the tile fragments not thought to be significant. The material was probably a dump of waste relating to a phase of demolition or building work at the chancel. Overlying the mortar deposit was brown slightly sandy topsoil loam topsoil.

The trench for the soakaway (which comprises a single plastic soakaway crate) was positioned seven metres east of the chancel. The trench was 1.30m x 1m in area and 0.80m deep (Plate 4). Orangey brown sandy silt churchyard soil was exposed in the lower part of the trench, slightly patchy and sandier in places but grave cuts were not identified. Two disarticulated human bones (a humerus and a hand or foot bone) were found in the base of the trench in its south-east corner. It seemed very likely that burials existed at a lower level.

## **Trench 2**

'Trench' 2 was excavated at the west side of the third side buttress of the north aisle (Fig. 1 and Plate 5). It was approximately a metre square although rather irregular due to the nature of the deposits encountered. The existing gully and its related base and drainage pipe was exposed to a depth of 0.50m but extended down below this and was a substantial brick and concrete feature. It was not possible for the contractors to remove the gully during the monitoring visit due to heavy rain and the need to maintain connection to the existing drain. It was, however, almost certain that nothing of archaeological interest would survive in the area of, and at the depth required for, the new gully. No finds or human remains were recovered from the area.

## **6.0 The finds**

### **Ceramic building material**

By Sue Anderson

Two fragments of CBM were recovered from context 2. Both were pieces of plain roof tile. The pieces were both in fine sandy fabrics with ferrous inclusions, although the matrix of the fabric was different, appearing finer in one. This latter had a reduced core, as is common in medieval roof tiles of the area, and was covered in patches of medium sandy cream-coloured mortar, including on the broken edges. The other fragment was a piece of nib tile, fully oxidised, but probably of medieval or late medieval date. This one had a thin medium sandy buff mortar all over. Both were presumably re-used in hard core at some point. There is a suggestion that building material, particularly the stone Norman doorway and arcades, was re-used from the nearby priory (Knott 2011), and it is possible that nib tiles could have been used in that structure – these tiles are usually a relatively early type in East Anglia, although often found alongside peg tiles.

## **Metal find**

Part of an iron coffin handle was found during metal detecting the spoil from the soakaway (Its date was uncertain but it is likely to have been post-medieval (Roberts 2012, 51).<sup>1</sup>

## **7.0 Conclusions**

Natural subsoil was not reached by any of the excavations.

The excavations did not expose any of the footings of the church or other evidence relating to the history of the building.

Evidence of burials was seen in the eastern trench. This is unsurprising given the graveyard context and, particularly, the proximity of that trench to the chancel, an area where many burials often occur. The evidence included soils disturbed by grave digging, pieces of disarticulated human bone and a coffin handle.

A large solid deposit of mortar with flint and tile within it was exposed to the east of the vestry, possibly aligned, east to west, with the church (although this may be coincidental). It was unknown whether this represented an *in situ* footing of some kind; the horizontal 'courses of tile might support this idea but it is unlikely that any such feature was structural. It is possible that it represents the base of a feature, perhaps such as a tomb or churchyard cross. The latter were common in the medieval period serving as memorials and having a liturgical function for the celebration of Mass on Palm Sunday (Hayman, 2007, 179). This position, in the northern area of the churchyard and away from its main access may, however, make this interpretation unlikely (Rodwell 2012, 301). Furthermore, it seems likely that any tomb requiring such a substantial footing would extend to a greater depth and, also, be of a relatively late date and would survive above ground. It is possible that the mortar deposit represents waste building material – perhaps deriving from one of the phases of rebuilding of the chancel. Tiles found in the mortar are of medieval or late medieval date and, whatever the nature of the mortar deposit, they may have derived from the church building, the Abbey (see Anderson, above) or from elsewhere.

To the north of the church a small area was excavated in preparation for the installation of a new gully. The area was seen to be heavily disturbed by an existing modern brick and concrete gully and nothing of archaeological interest was seen.

The only finds were the pieces of medieval tile extracted from the mortar deposit and an iron coffin handle which was of likely post-medieval date.

A few pieces and fragments of disarticulated human bone were found in the trenches excavated to the east of the vestry. These were left in the care of the church and were reburied in the same area by the contractor the day after the monitoring visit and following consultation by Andrew Campbell with the Vicar.

## **Acknowledgements**

The archaeological work was commissioned and funded by Sibton PCC. The drainage and building works were undertaken by EFL Ltd contractors and thanks go to Markus Munford and his colleagues for facilitating the archaeological work as necessary.

Archaeological monitoring of the project was undertaken by Abby Antrobus (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service). Her input and advice, including consultation with the Diocesan archaeological advisor Bob Carr, is gratefully acknowledged.

The advice of and interest of Domenico D'Alessandro and Gethin Harvey (formerly NWA Architect Ltd) and Andrew Campbell (Sibton PCC), the Churchwardens and members of Sibton PCC and church is gratefully acknowledged. Information from the SHER was provided by staff of Suffolk Historic Environment Service.

Archaeological monitoring and recording was by Sarah Bates. The tile was dated and commented on by Sue Anderson.

Figure 1 is based upon a drawing of the church (roof plan) provided by Nicholas Warns Architect Ltd.

## **References:**

British Geological Survey 2015	<a href="http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html">http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html</a>
Campbell, A., 2015	<i>The Parish Church of St Peter, Sibton Church Guide</i>
Hayman, R., 2007	<i>A Concise Guide to the Parish Church (Tempus)</i>
Knott, S., 2011	'St Peter, Sibton', <i>Suffolk Churches website</i> , <a href="http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/sibton.html">www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/sibton.html</a>
LandIS 2019	<a href="http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/">http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/</a> Cranfield University, Soil and Agrifood Institute, Land Information Service
Moore, J.L.M., 1892	'Sibton Church' Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History Vol. VIII, part 1 <a href="http://suffolk.institute.pdfsrv.co.uk/">http://suffolk.institute.pdfsrv.co.uk/</a>
Rodwell, W., 2012	<i>The Archaeology of Churches (Amberley)</i>
Suffolk County Council 2012	<a href="http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html">http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html</a>



## Appendix 1

# OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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**OASIS ID: sarahbat1-378184**

#### Project details

Project name	St Peter's Church, Sibton, drainage works
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring during the installation of new rainwater gullies and a soakaway at St Peter's Church, Sibton resulted in largely negative results. A solid deposit of flint, tile and mortar was probably a footing of some kind but did not appear to be structural. Some tile fragments from the footing are of medieval and, possibly, late medieval date. Part of an iron coffin nail was found. (Repairs were made to parapets at the east end of the church but this work was not monitored although some photographs taken prior to the work are included in the project archive)
Project dates	Start: 21-10-2019 End: 21-10-2019
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	SBT 016 - Related HER No.
Type of project	Recording project
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	FOOTING Uncertain
Significant Finds	ROOF TILE Medieval
Significant Finds	COFFIN HANDLE Post Medieval
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

#### Project location

Country	England
Site location	SUFFOLK SUFFOLK COASTAL SIBTON St Peter's Church
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	TM 3674 6954 52.272379100057 1.470459588369 52 16 20 N 001 28 13 E Point

#### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Sarah Bates
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Sarah Bates
Project	Sarah Bates

director/manager	
Project supervisor	Sarah Bates
Type of sponsor/funding body	PCC
Name of sponsor/funding body	Sibton PCC

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service
Digital Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Report"

### Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Report of Work under Archaeological Supervision and Control, St Peter's Church, Sibton, Suffolk, Drainage works
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Bates. S
Other bibliographic details	Report no. 48
Date	2019
Issuer or publisher	Sarah Bates
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Description	A4 Grey literature report
Entered by	Sarah Bates (sj.bates@yahoo.co.uk)
Entered on	27 January 2020

## OASIS:

## Appendix 2: List of contexts

Context	Type	Area	Category	Description
1	Trench	1	Contractor's trench	trenches for drains east of N vestry
2	Trench	2	Contractor's trench	trench for gully at N aisle
3	Trench	1	Deposit	Solid mortar deposit/?footing

## Appendix 3

Context	Type	No	Wt (g)	Description	Date
2	Roof tile	2	480	One is a fragment from a nib tile	Med/late med

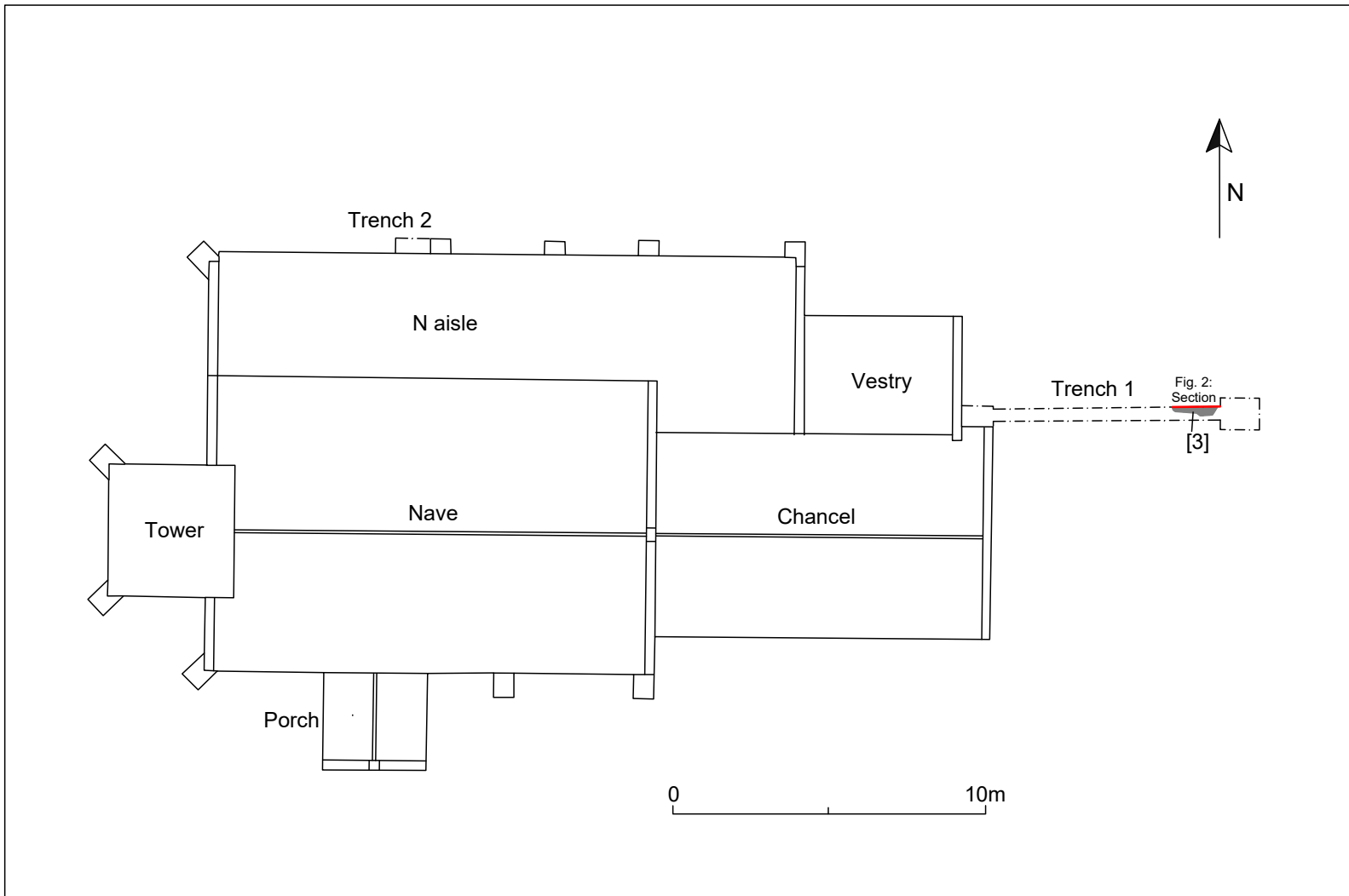


Fig. 3: Plan of St Peter's Church with excavated trenches. Scale 1:200

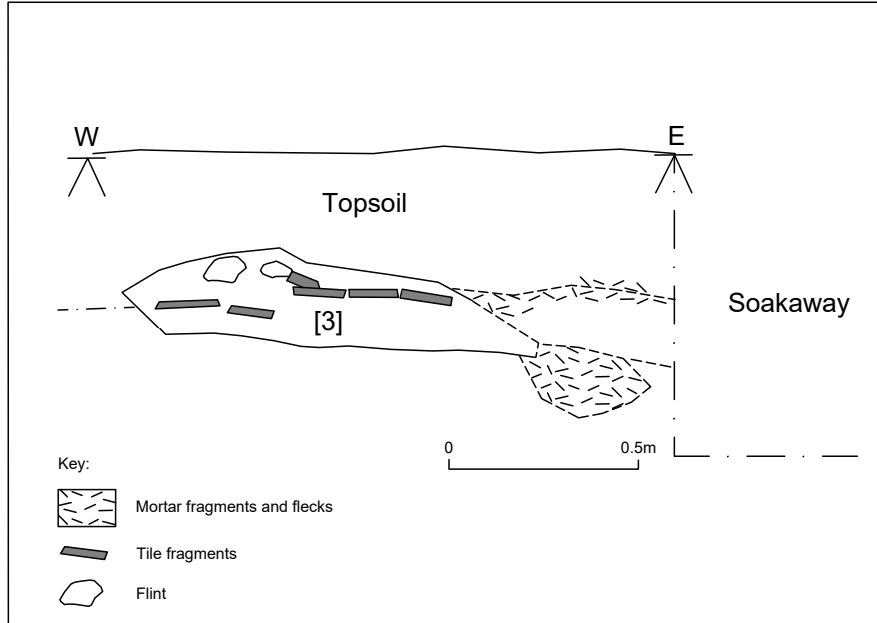


Fig. 2: Trench 1, S-facing section, deposit [3]. Scale 1:20 (for location see Fig. 1)



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking W. 1m and 0.5m scales



Plate 2: Trench 1, deposit [3], looking N from above. 0.5m scale



Plate 3: Trench 1, deposit [3], looking N. 0.5m scale



Plate 4: Trench 1 (soakaway), looking S, 1m scale



Plate 5: Trench 2, existing brick gully *in situ*, looking S.  
0.5m scale