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St John the Apostle, Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire

An Archaeological Watching Brief Report

for Peter Davies on behalf of

Sheepscombe PCC

Chiz Harward BA MIfA

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

St John the Apostle, Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire

Client:	Peter Davies, on behalf of Sheepscombe PCC
Diocese:	Gloucester
Faculty date:	14th July 2017
NGR:	SO 8918 1011
Project no:	UA177
Author:	Chiz Harward BA MIfA
Doc Ref:	UA177_wb_WSI_v1
Date:	August 24th 2017
Site Code:	SHE17
OASIS ref:	urbanarc1- 291077

Front cover: View of drain [6] with stone slab roof in situ, looking south; scales 0.3m and 0.5m

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Non Technical Summary

On the 8th and 9th August 2017 Urban Archaeology carried out a watching brief at St John the Apostle, Sheepscombe during the construction of two new French Drains and soakaways within the churchyard to the north of the church.

Archaeological recording shows that the site was terraced to create a horizontal platform for the construction of the church, which was built with limited foundations on the exposed natural ground. The observed walls date from the early 19th century rebuild of the west end when the porch and tower were added. The south side of the nave was built directly on the natural clay substrate, with foundations limited to a buttress; the north side of the nave was founded on a single, slightly offset course of limestone rubble blocks, whilst the porch, carrying the bell tower, had at least two courses of rubble foundation.

There was no evidence for dumping of spoil at the north of the graveyard to level the ground, and it may be that the steep slope to the north is largely due to the hollow-way to the north and the underlying and complex local topography.

A stone drain identified in the eastern trench had a fall to the north down the slope. It is undated, but is likely to date from the construction of the original church, or its 1872 enlargement, and be part of a system intended to take water away from the church, presumably draining into the hollow-way to the north.

The results of the watching brief have met the aims of ensuring that an adequate archaeological record has been made of the groundworks. No human remains, burials or grave furniture were disturbed during the watching brief. The results of the watching brief are of local significance and no further work is recommended.

1 Introduction and planning background

- 1.1 On 8th and 9th August 2017 Urban Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of Sheepscombe, at St John the Apostle, Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire, SO 8918 1011 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2 The Schedule dated 20th March 2017 outlined the proposed work, which was to construct two new French Drains and soakaways within the churchyard to the north of the church (Falconer, Gilbert and Scott, 2017).
- 1.3 A Faculty for the work was approved on 14th July 2017. A condition on the Faculty requested an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of the drains and soakaways. No formal archaeological brief was issued, however the project was discussed with the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, David Thackray.
- 1.4 A detailed methodology for the archaeological watching brief of the site was set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Harward 2017). The fieldwork followed the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (ClfA 2014a), and the *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*(MORPHE): *Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006).

2 Site background

- 2.1 The site is a Grade II listed church (list no 1091018) located within a churchyard on Church Hill, in the centre of the village of Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire. The site overlooks the Sheepscombe brook to the north and lies at approximately 149m OD.
- 2.2 The church was designed by John Wight and built in 1820, being enlarged by Francis Niblett in 1872. It is constructed of Limestone ashlar with stone slate roofs. It is in active use as a place of worship, although for many years burials have been interred within an external graveyard to the northeast.
- 2.3 The geology of the site is mapped as Lias Group And Inferior Oolite Group, there are no recorded superficial deposits (British Geological Survey 2017).
- 2.4 The Site Code for the watching brief is SHE17.

3 Archaeological and historical background

- 3.1 Settlement is first documented at Sheepscombe in 1263, the village is to the east northeast of Painswick in a valley below the ancient estate of Ebworth Park. The original settlement may have been scattered farms and buildings, however of the 52 houses recorded in Sheepscombe tithing in 1672 some were in the present village, which contains late 17th or early 18th century buildings (Baggs, Jurica, and Sheils 1976).

- 3.2 From the 18th until the middle of the 19th century Sheepscombe developed as a weaving settlement around the mills on the Sheepscombe brook with many cottages and buildings dating from the prosperous years of the cloth trade. The decline of the weaving industry is marked by a fall in the population of Sheepscombe tithing from 803 people in 1831 to 510 people in 1861 (*ibid*).
- 3.3 In 1820 St John's church was constructed at the Green, midway between the old village and Jack's Green to the design of John Wight. Soon after the west front was rebuilt with pinnacles and buttresses, and a porch and tower were added. It remained a chapel of ease to Painswick until 1844. In 1872 the church was enlarged to the design of Francis Niblett, with the nave extended and roof raised. The chancel was added, with new vestry and south aisle. The gallery was removed and pine pews installed. (*ibid*, Skinner 1996).
- 3.4 The church is shown on the 1883 Ordnance Survey 25" map where it is marked as St John the Baptist's Church. A separate graveyard is located across the lane to the east. On the 1903 and 1923 Ordnance Survey revisions the church was marked as St John's Church.
- 3.5 There was a major re-ordering of the church in 1996 with the choir stalls and organ moved to the south aisle, the floor was tiled to match the aisle, and the east window was restored 2004 (Skinner 1996). The church is in good repair with pew seating for around 80 people.

4 Aims of the watching brief

- 4.1 The objectives of the watching brief were to minimise disturbance to archaeological remains and to record, as far as was reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains that were exposed or would be destroyed by the proposed development. Attention was given to sites and remains of all periods (including evidence of past environments).

5 Methodology

- 5.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the relevant *Standards and Guidance* produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. The work was carried out on the 8th and 9th August 2017 and consisted of the monitoring and archaeological recording of the excavation of two French drains and soakaways within the churchyard to the north of the church (Fig. 2).
- 5.2 A 0.4m–0.6m deep drainage trench was excavated from the south western corner of the nave, running around the west end of the church, extending into the graveyard and terminating in a 2.0m x 0.68m x 0.8m deep soakaway (Trench 1). Two trenches lead from downpipes at the northeast corner of the nave, joined and lead to a second soakaway of similar dimensions (Trench 2). A pre-start meeting had discussed the proposed works in

order to minimise risk of disturbance to archaeological remains, in particular graves, and the routes had been carefully selected to minimise the risk.

- 5.3 Archaeological recording work was carried out in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (Harward 2017) and the methodologies described and referred to in that document.
- 5.4 Levels were taken relative to the OS benchmark on the south eastern corner of the church, value 149.28m OD.
- 5.4 The Site Code for the archaeological work was SHE17.

6 Results

- 6.1 This section provides an overview of the watching brief results; summaries of the recorded contexts and a Harris matrix are to be found in Appendices 1 and 2. No finds were recovered from the watching brief.

Trench 1

- 6.2 Trench 1 was excavated around the western side of the church and then northeast into the graveyard (Fig 2). Natural ground was observed along the length of the trench and consisted of a mid orange-yellow sandy clay sealed by limestone hillwash/colluvium (5). The surface of the natural ground sloped from 148.41m OD at the south to 148.10m OD at the north.
- 6.3 The natural substrate had been horizontally truncated prior to the construction of St John the Apostle [6]. The ashlar superstructure of the west wall of the southern part of the nave was founded directly on the truncated surface of the natural substrate at 148.41m OD, with a rubble foundation only at the buttress (base not observed, Fig. 3). The northern nave had a slightly offset course of rubble blocks as a foundation, with the base of the foundation at 148.17m OD, slightly deeper than the south side (Fig. 4). The porch had a deeper foundation of roughly squared blocks (base not observed). The superstructure of nave west wall and porch was all of one build.
- 6.4 The foundations were sealed by the topsoil and turf layer (1) which sloped from 148.68m OD to 148.27m OD at the south.

Trench 2

- 6.5 Trench 2 consisted of two trenches running from the north eastern corner of the nave, joining to run to the north into a new soakaway location.
- 6.6 Natural ground was observed along the trench and consisted of a mid orange-yellow sandy clay sealed by limestone hillwash/colluvium (5). The surface of the natural ground sloped from 148.36m OD at the south to 147.45m OD at the north.

- 6.7 Cutting through the natural substrate was a north–south aligned trench [8] containing stone drain [6] (Fig. 5). The drain was built directly on the flat base of the trench, which sloped down to the south from 147.58–147.31m OD. The drain was constructed from un-worked limestone rubble built without any mortar or cement bonding, with two side walls 0.3m high and approximately 150mm apart (Fig. 6). The drain was roofed with large irregular limestone rubble pieces (*front cover*).
- 6.8 Within construction cut [8] the drain was sealed by a mixed clay, soil and brash backfill (7), which was in turn sealed by the topsoil and turf layer (1) which sloped from 148.77m OD to 147.82m OD at the south. At the south of the trench the new drainage trenches followed existing drainage runs which were filled with pea grit.
- 6.9 No human remains were recovered from either of the trenches, or from screening of the spoil. No burials or grave markers were disturbed during the works.

7 Conclusions and statement of significance

- 7.1 The excavation of the drainage trenches and soakaways has added to our understanding of the development and construction of the church of St John the Apostle.
- 7.2 The site was clearly terraced to create a horizontal platform for the construction of the church, which was built on the exposed natural ground with only limited foundations. The observed walls date from the early 19th century rebuild of the west end of the nave and the addition of the porch and tower. The south side of the nave west wall was built directly on the natural clay substrate, with foundations limited to a buttress, the north side of the nave's west wall was founded on a single slightly offset course of limestone rubble blocks, whilst the porch, carrying the bell tower, had at least two courses of rubble foundation.
- 7.3 There was no evidence for dumping of spoil at the north of the graveyard to level the ground, and it may be that the steep slope to the north is largely due to the holloway to the north and the underlying and complex natural topography.
- 7.4 The stone drain is constructed in a typical style for the Cotswolds; it is undated, but is likely to date from the construction of the original church, or its 1872 enlargement, and be part of the drainage to take water away from the church to drain, presumably, into the hollow-way to the north.
- 7.5 The new French drains and soakaways were designed to avoid disturbing burials as far as practicably possible. Due to the site's topography the drainage runs were dug deeper than designed to ensure an adequate fall, however no burials were disturbed and no human remains were recovered from the works.
- 7.6 The results of the watching brief have met the aims of ensuring that an adequate archaeological record has been made of the remains disturbed, exposed or destroyed by the

groundworks. The results of the watching brief are of local significance only and no further work is recommended on the site archive.

8 Acknowledgements

- 8.1 The author would like to thank Peter Davies of Sheepscombe PCC for commissioning the work and for his help on site and in providing information on the scheme. We would also like to thank Rob and Steve Workman for their assistance on site. Chiz Harward would also like to thank David Thackray (Gloucestershire Diocesan Archaeological Advisor) and Adam Klups (Church Buildings Officer) for their assistance and advice on the watching brief. The watching brief was carried out by the author.

9 Archive

- 9.1 The site code SHE17 has been allocated to the excavation.
- 9.2 The archive from the watching brief is currently held by Urban Archaeology at their offices in Stroud. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with Stroud Museum in the Park along with the site archive. The site archive will comprise all written, drawn and photographic records and will be deposited within Stroud Museum in the Park and/or OASIS/Archaeology Data Service (ADS).
- 9.3 The archive will be prepared in accordance with Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage (UKIC 1990), specifically complying with Stroud Museum in the Park and OASIS/ADS guidelines. The archive will be presented to the receiving museum within six months of the completion of the fieldwork (unless alternative arrangements have been agreed in writing with the Diocese). The archive will then become publicly accessible.
- 9.4 A copy of this report and a summary of information from this project will be submitted to the OASIS database of archaeological publications (Appendix 4). A further copy of the report will be submitted to Gloucestershire HER. Shape files of the watching brief trench locations will also be submitted to the HER.

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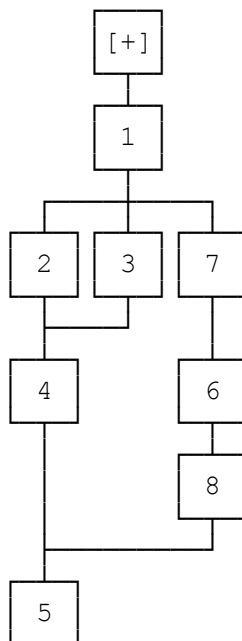
Appendix 1 Context Register

Context no	Type	Description
1	Deposit	Topsoil and turf
2	Masonry	Church foundation
3	Masonry	Porch foundation
4	Cut	Cut for church and porch
5	Deposit	Natural brash
6	Masonry	Stone drain
7	Deposit	Backfill over drain
8	Cut	Cut for drain

Table 1: Context register

Appendix 2 Harris matrix

Harris matrix of SHE17_wb



Appendix 3 Archive contents

Digital archive

Type	Number	Comments
Digital photographs	36	

Table 2: Digital archive

Paper archive

Type	Number	Comments
Context sheets	8	
Trench record sheet	2	
Registers	3	Context, drawing and photo

Table 3: Paper archive

Drawn archive

Type	Number	Comments
Permatrace	4	three plan sheets, one section sheet

Table 4: Drawn archive

Appendix 4 OASIS Form

OASIS ID	urbanarc1-289653
PROJECT DETAILS	
Project name	St John the Apostle Sheepscombe
Short description of the project	On the 8th and 9th August 2017 Urban Archaeology carried out a watching brief at St John the Apostle, Sheepscombe during the construction of two new French Drains and soakaways within the churchyard to the north of the church. Archaeological recording shows that the site was terraced to create a horizontal platform for the construction of the church, which was built with only limited foundations on the exposed natural ground. The observed walls date from the early 19th century rebuild of the west end when the porch and tower were added. The south side of the nave was built directly on the natural clay substrate, with foundations limited to a buttress; the north side of the nave was founded on a single, slightly offset course of limestone rubble blocks, whilst the porch, carrying the bell tower, had at least two courses of rubble foundation. There was no evidence for dumping of spoil at the north of the graveyard to level the ground, and it may be that the steep slope to the north is largely due to the hollow-way to the north and the underlying and complex local topography. A stone drain identified in the eastern trench had a fall north down the slope. It is undated, but is likely to date from the construction of the

	original church, or its 1872 enlargement, and be part of a system intended to take water away from the church, presumably draining into the hollow-way to the north. No human remains, burials or grave furniture were disturbed during the watching brief.
Project dates	Start: 08-08-2017 End: 09-08-2017
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	UA177 - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	SHE17 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	DRAIN Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction
PROJECT LOCATION	
Country	England
Site location	GLOUCESTERSHIRE STROUD PAINSWICK St John the Apostle Sheepscombe
Postcode	GL6 7RF
Study area	20 Square metres
Site coordinates	SO 8918 1011 51.789091602687 -2.156888779266 51 47 20 N 002 09 24 W Point
PROJECT CREATORS	
Name of Organisation	Urban Archaeology
Project brief originator	Contractor (design and execute)
Project design originator	Urban Archaeology
Project director/manager	Chiz Harward
Project Supervisor	Chiz Harward
Type of sponsor/funding body	Parochial Church Council
Name of sponsor/funding body	Parochial Church Council of Sheepscombe
PROJECT ARCHIVES	
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	OASIS
Digital Contents	"other"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography"
Paper Archive recipient	Stroud Museum in the Park

Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet", "Drawing", "Matrices", "Plan", "Report", "Section"
Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature
Title	St John the Apostle, Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire, An Archaeological Watching Brief Report
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Harward, C.
Date	2017
Issuer or publisher	Urban Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	Stroud
Description	Illustrated typescript report



Fig. 1 Site location

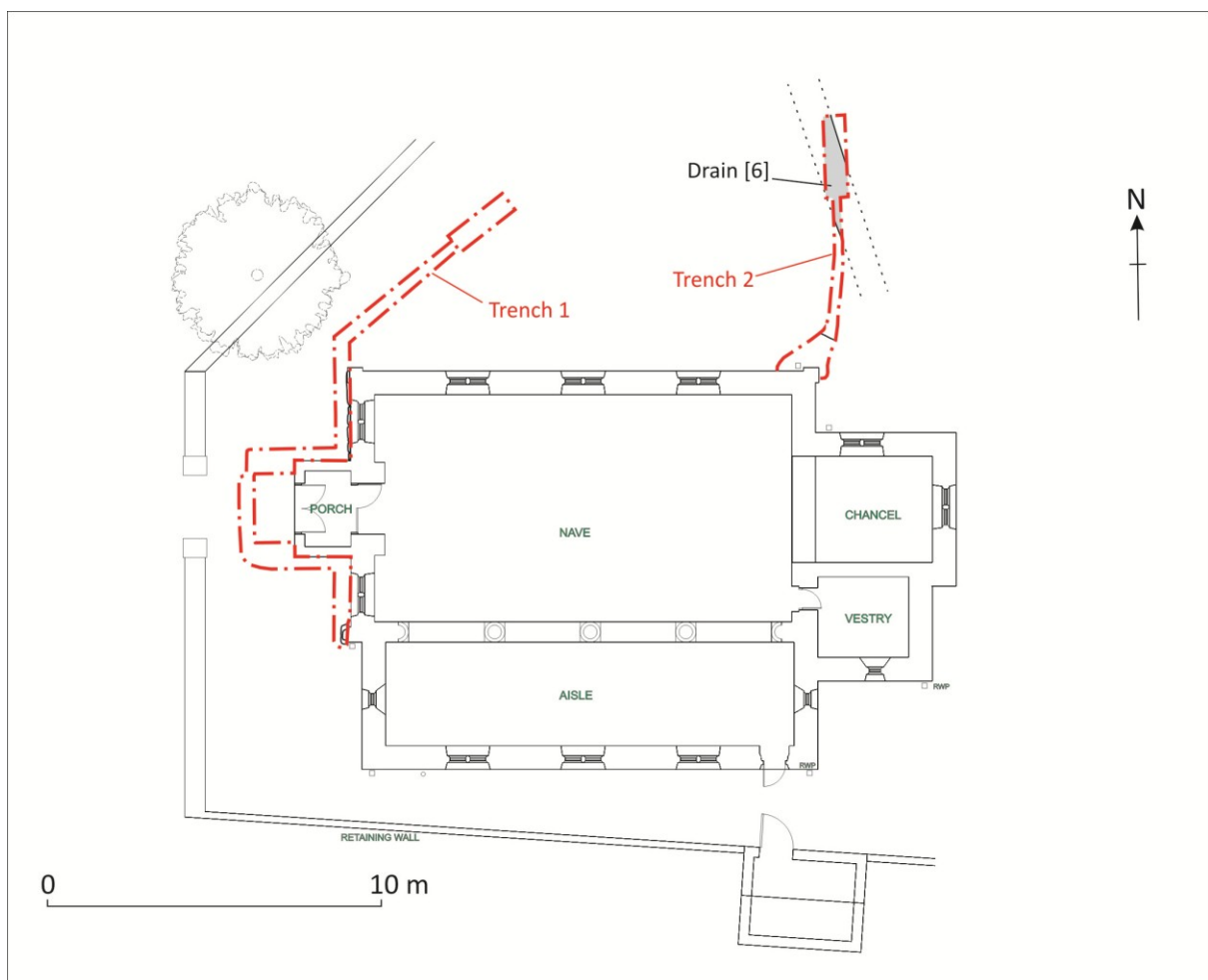


Fig. 2 Trench plan



Fig. 3 View of nave [2] and porch foundations [3] looking southwest showing superstructure sitting directly on natural clay; scale 0.5m



Fig. 4 View of church and porch foundations [2] and [3], looking northeast; scale 0.5m

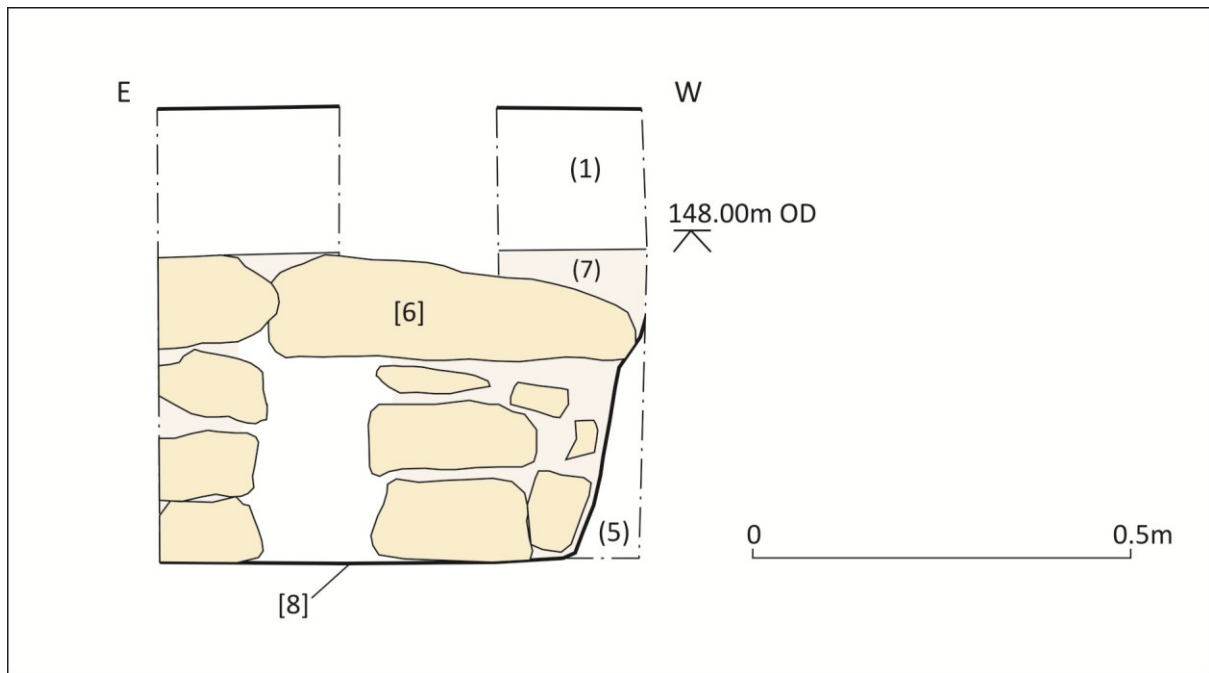


Fig. 5 North facing section across drain [6]



Fig. 6 View of drain [6] with lid removed, looking south; scales 0.3m and 0.5m