

# Christ Church Downend South Gloucestershire

## Report on Archaeological Watching Brief



Rachel Heaton BSc

Avon Archaeology Limited  
Bristol: January 2018





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OS NGR ST 64962 76497



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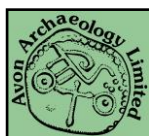
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## Abstract

*Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Maggie Nichols to carry out archaeological monitoring at Christ Church, Downend, during works associated with the refurbishment and modernisation of the building. The project includes replacement of all services, re-arrangement of kitchen and bathroom facilities, and opening of a blocked entrance on the south side of the Church.*

*Planned ground works presented a possibility of finding and recording archaeological features and deposits. As the site is within a graveyard, there was also potential to uncover burials.*

*Unfortunately monitoring was not in place when the majority of the ground-works occurred. Eight burial vaults were uncovered during the removal of the floor within the nave; though most appeared empty, one was apparently full to capacity; just below the floor surface a sealed lead coffin was revealed.*

*Research into the history of the church found that it was constructed as a Chapel of Ease in 1831 to ease pressure at the parish church, which was then St James, Mangotsfield. Downend became a parish in its own right in 1874 and Christ Church became the parish church. Plans and maps record the gradual extension to the church which occurred in three phases. There is no indication as to why the original chapel was located on this site.*



## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Maggie Nichols for the tour around the church, detailed descriptions of the work already done, along with the provision of photos and plans. Thanks are also due to Domenic and his team for assistance during the site visit and to Paul Chester at MEB Design for providing building plans.

## Notes

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited has taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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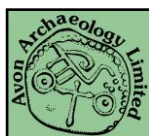
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All enquiries should be addressed to:  
Avon Archaeology Limited  
Avondale Business Centre  
Woodland Way, Kingswood  
Bristol BS15 1AW  
Telephone and Facsimile 0117 960 8487.  
Email: [mail@avonarchaeology.co.uk](mailto:mail@avonarchaeology.co.uk)

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## Abbreviations

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
B&NES	Bath and North East Somerset
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



## 1 Introduction

Avon Archaeology Limited has been contracted by Maggie Nichols, Project Co-ordinator, on behalf of, and in line with the requirement of the Bristol Diocese to undertake an archaeological watching brief during works associated with the repair and modernisation of Christ Church, Downend, South Gloucestershire. The building, which received a Grade II listing by Historic England in 1981, (reference 1320055) urgently requires work to ensure its continued preservation and use. Christ Church is centred on NGR ST 64962 76497.

The renovation works at the church required the complete replacement of services (gas, electricity and water) within the building. The project intends to install underfloor heating, re-arrange the bathroom and kitchen facilities, as well as updating and repairing internal elements of building. A new porch, and disabled access will be constructed on the south side of the building where a former entrance is currently blocked.

The faculty issued by Bristol Diocese has requested that all ground-works should be monitored archaeologically. Unfortunately the faculty requiring archaeological monitoring was delayed and only issued when the ground works were on the verge of completion.

A visit was made by the writer of this report, Rachel Heaton, on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

## 2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

Christ Church is located 200m south east of the centre of Downend, a suburb of Greater Bristol, within the South Gloucestershire unitary authority.

The church sits within a parcel of land which is bounded to the north-west by Downend Road, north-east by the W.G. Grace Cricket ground and south-east by





North Street. The church hall and Christchurch Primary School are located to the south-west, beyond Christchurch Lane.

Topographically the site is relatively flat, and is sited at approximately 73m aOD.

The solid geology underlying the site consists of Downend Member Sandstone. This a Sedimentary Bedrock which was formed approximately 310 to 315 million years ago in the Carboniferous Period, when the local environment was dominated by rivers (BGS online Viewer).

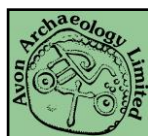
### **3 Archaeological and Historical Background**

There are no known archaeological sites recorded in or around Downend; no evidence of prehistoric or Romano-British activity.

Historical records show Downend as a hamlet within the ancient Parish of Mangotsfield. Little is known about the area before the Norman Conquest and it is not known for sure if the medieval manor at Mangotsfield was of Saxon date. It is however probable given its Saxon place-name, which appears in the Domesday Survey (1086) as '*Manegodesfelle*' meaning 'open land of a man called Mangod' (Mills). The name Downend is clearly born out of its location within the parish, being on the western fringe of the medieval chase, and simply means 'end of the down'.

Downend appears as a hamlet on the 1843 tithe map (see frontispiece); predominantly agricultural land, interspersed with cottages and other buildings, often either side of local roads and trackways. Downend Road was almost certainly the route of a branch of the Mangotsfield Turnpike.

Successive Ordnance survey maps show gradual development of the settlement throughout the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.



## Christ Church

The church was designed and built by local architect, Oliver Greenway, sometime around 1831. It was originally built as a chapel of ease to St James Church, which remains the parish church for Mangotsfield. Christ Church became the parish church for Downend when it became a parish in its own right in 1874. The Chancel was not part of the original structure, but was added 1913/14 and designed and built by Henry Bennet. A rose window was incorporated into the east end of the building, and an additional entrance on the south side of the structure was also part of this extension.

A further extension to the east of the chancel, to provide additional facilities to the church, was made between 1920 and 1930. The three phases of construction can be seen within the ground floor plan of the building, and is evident on successive Ordnance Survey maps, which show changes in the shape and size of the church's footprint (Figure 2).

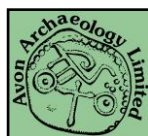
The main body of the building is in the Gothic style, constructed from coursed Pennant stone, with ashlar dressings and a slate roof. The nave has five bays, with ashlar parapets, with three light lancets and headstops to labels. There are raised galleries on three sides of the nave, which are supported by slender quatrefoil iron columns. The ceiling is barrel vaulted (Historic England).

Exactly why this particular location was chosen is not clear: there is not a direct route between Christ Church and the 'mother church', St James, as one might expect; additionally, there is no reference to any kind of religious building of any type on or close to the site before this time 1831.

Christ Church received a Grade II listing through Historic England in 1981, entry number 1320055 (Historic England).

## 4 The Monitoring

As indicated above, the ground-works were nearing completion when Avon Archaeology Ltd were appointed to monitor the site. The following provides a



summary of the work that had been carried out, using information provided by the project co-ordinator, with additional points of archaeological interest noted.

The ground-works required in and around the church were primarily associated with the removal and installation of new services (electric, gas and water). The most significant ground-works were carried out within the nave, where the floor was removed in order to install new service channels and to reduce the ground level in order to incorporate underfloor heating.

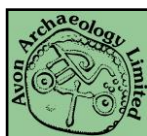
A number of repairs and refurbishment of the fixtures and fittings was also underway to modernise the space inside the church, including re-arrangement of kitchen and bathroom facilities.

At the time of the site visit, the floor within the nave had already been removed, exposing a fairly consistent light brown, fine dust and rubble deposit throughout. The floor surface had previously consisted of floor tiles and ledger slabs. The surface removal exposed eight coffin shaped burial vaults in four sets of pairs located down the centre of the nave (Figure 3, Plates 2, 3 & 4). Each is constructed from roughly coursed, roughly hewn Pennant sandstone, capped with slabs, to a maximum depth of 2m. No burials and no human remains were visible, and most appeared to be unused.

One of the vaults at the east end of the nave, directly in front of the chancel, was, however, used to capacity, the last burial having been made in a lead coffin which was centimetres from the modern floor surface (Figure 3, Plate 3).

A pair of burial vaults at the west end of the church were directly below two supporting posts for the upper gallery. The fact that they are in this location suggests that these two vaults predate the gallery, which may have not been an original feature of the building when it was first constructed circa 1831. An outline of these vaults could be seen at the time of the site visit after they had been filled (Plate 10).

The empty vaults were all filled with rubble to allow greater support to modern flooring.



The upper gallery within the nave is supported by twelve quatrefoil pillars. Those situated along the north and south side of the nave are located on a structural foundation wall of approximately 0.65m wide (depth unknown, Plate 8) which was visible at the time of the visit. A return wall to form a west side was not visible.

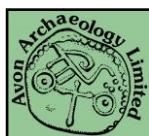
A trench for services had been excavated parallel to the outer face of the supporting foundation wall as shown in Figure 3. It is approximately 0.35m wide, and 0.4m deep, and lined with block and brickwork. It runs from the north east side of the chancel, around the nave, before passing into the rear extensions of the building on the south side. A corresponding trench on the outside of the church was excavated, but had been backfilled at the time of the visit.

The floor level of the chancel is approximately 1m higher than other areas of the church, which is worthy of note as the topography of the site is relatively flat. This part of the church was added some 80 years after the initial structure had been built; perhaps there are further burial vaults below it.

An entrance to the church was incorporated into the 1914 chancel extension. This has been blocked for many years (mid 20<sup>th</sup> century?) with a lean-to shed containing a gas boiler built up against it. The shed has been removed as the entrance will be re-opened as part of the current project. Plate 7 shows the blocked arched opening with a dark scar indicating the roof line of the gas boiler shed.

## 6 Conclusions

It is unfortunate that the archaeological watching brief was not in place at the beginning of the project; however it was possible to make limited records and plan some of the features that had been exposed during the works. It seems that whilst archaeological and historical features were exposed by the works, notably the lead coffin, no significant features or deposits have been adversely impacted.



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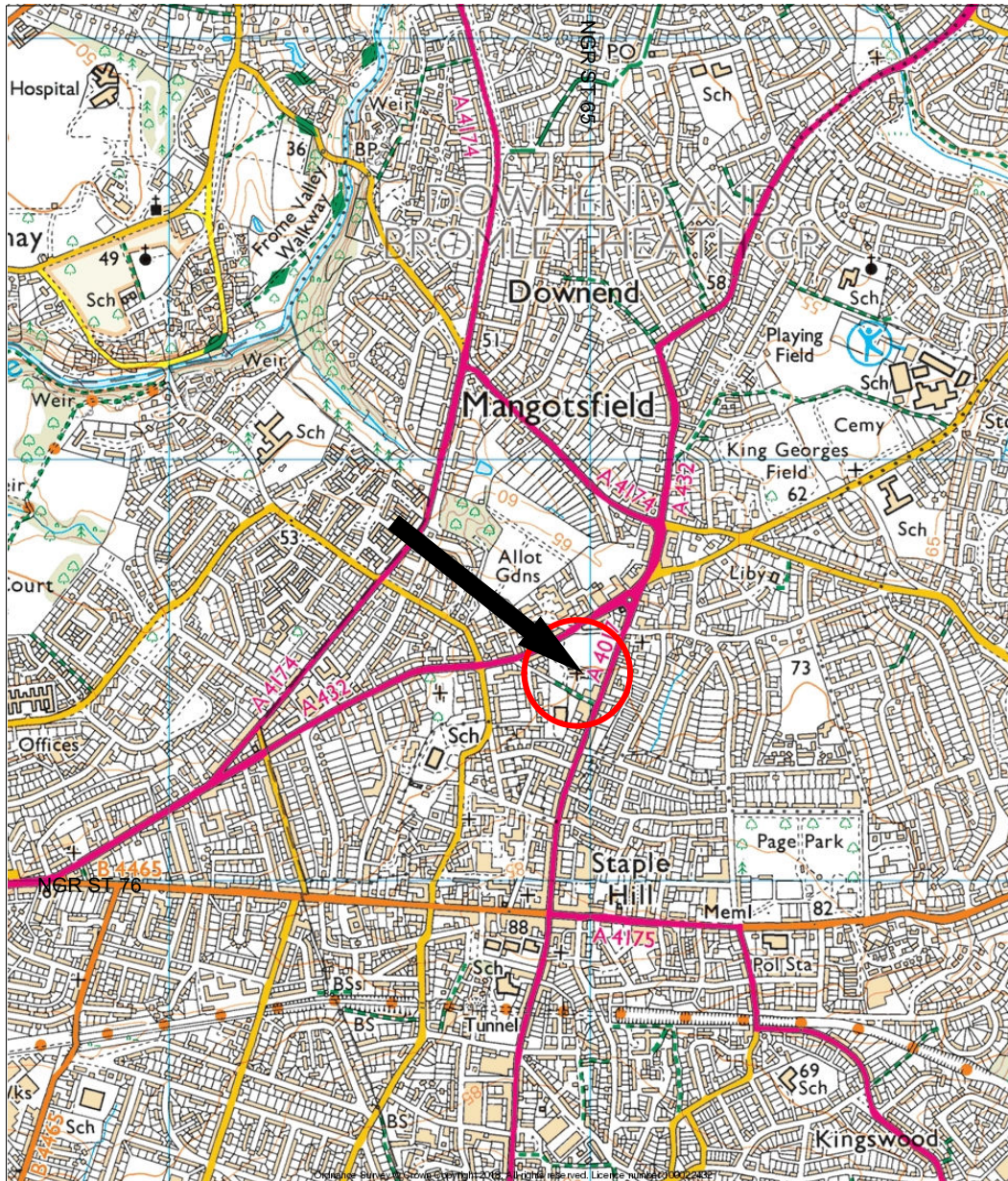
**Know Your Place West.** [www.kypwest.org.uk](http://www.kypwest.org.uk)

**Old Maps Online.** [www.old-maps.co.uk](http://www.old-maps.co.uk)



Figure 1

Site Location Map

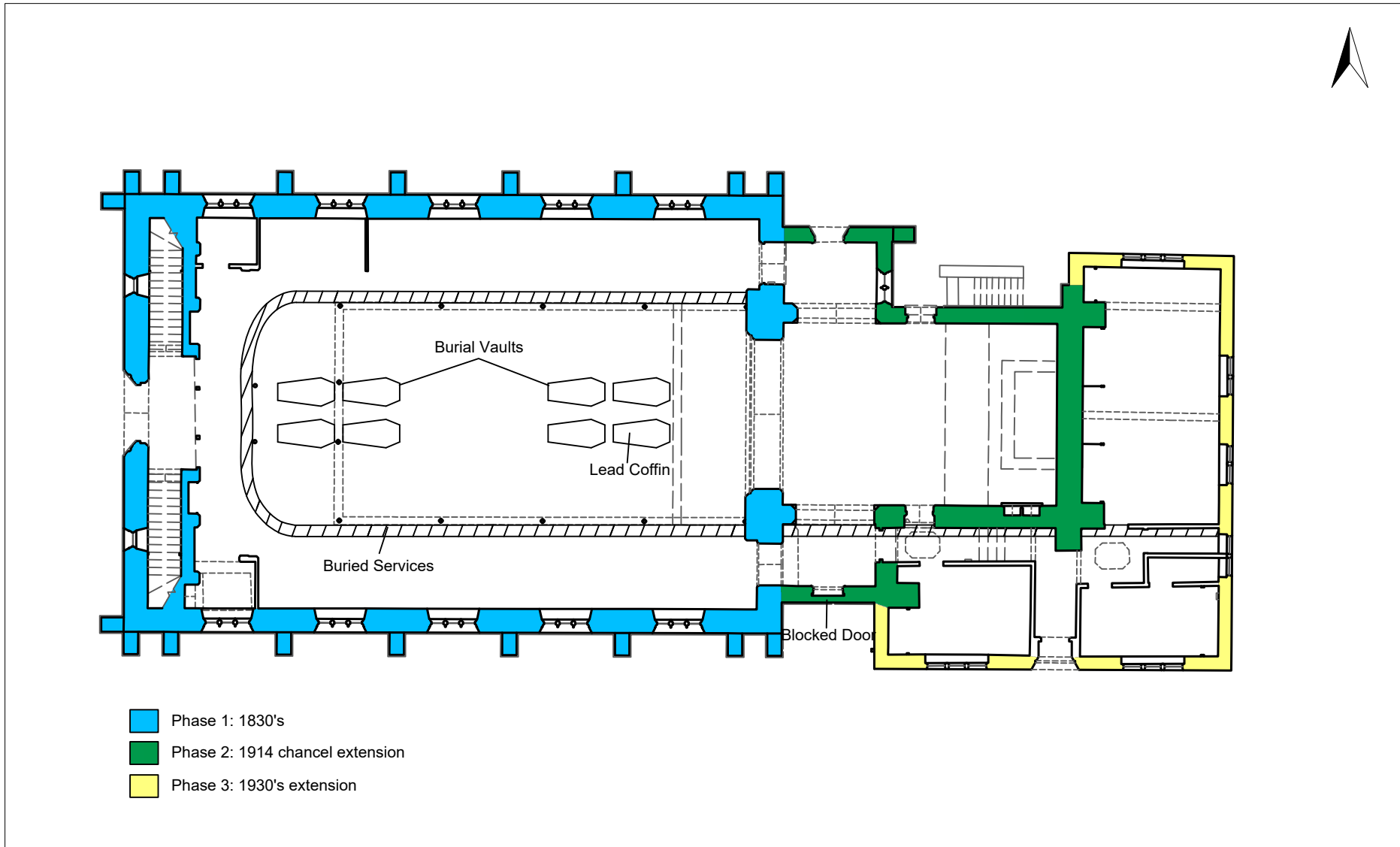


Not to Scale



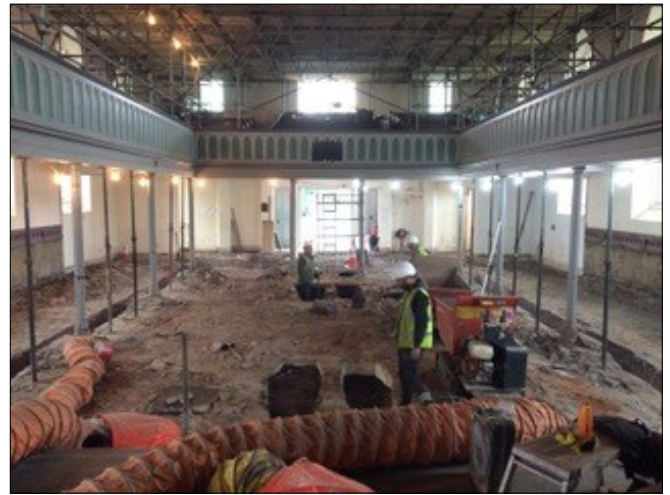
# Plan of Church and Features

## Figure 2





**Plate 1:** Work to remove the floor within the nave, view west (photo courtesy of M. Nichols).



**Plate 2:** Tops of burial vaults exposed down the centre of the nave, view west (photo courtesy of M. Nichols).



**Plate 3:** Detail of four burial vaults. A sealed lead coffin can be seen in the vault, bottom right. (photo courtesy of M. Nichols).



**Plate 4:** Two burial vaults directly underneath gallery supports, view east in the nave (photo courtesy of M. Nichols).



**Plate 5:** South side of Church where two ledger slabs removed prior to work to open south entrance.



**Plate 6:** Back-filled services trench, diagonally across shot, to wards mains connections in North Street.





**Plate 7:** The blocked south entrance to the Church. A lean too structure which contained a gas boiler has been removed, but the scar is visible on the stone work.



**Plate 8:** New services trench, parallel to structural support wall, within the south gallery of the nave, view east.



**Plate 9:** Back-filled burial vault at the east end of the nave. The vault contained the lead coffin which remains in situ.



**Plate 10:** Just visible, the dividing wall between two burial vaults at the west end of the nave, found directly below gallery support columns.