

ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH, CODSALL, SOUTH
STAFFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

CLIENT: THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
OF ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH

MAY 2018

DOCUMENT NO:CA133/HMB/pcccodsall2

OASIS REF: COMMERC1-317427

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ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH, CODSALL, SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON DRAINAGE TRENCH.

Report No: CA133/HMB/pcccodsall2
Site name: St. Nicholas's Church.
Location: Codsall, South Staffordshire NGR SJ 86618 04051
OASIS ref: commerci1-317727
Accession details: Potteries Museum and Art Gallery: No. 2018:LH:42

1. Report Summary:

Commercial Archaeology Ltd (CAL) was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St. Nicholas's Church in Codsall, South Staffordshire (Figure 1) to undertake archaeological monitoring during the excavation of a drainage trench leading from the base of the west tower and extending along the outer wall of the northern aisle (Figure 2). The drainage was required to service a new disabled WC and tea bar being installed in the tower.

St. Nicholas's Church is a grade II* listed building of medieval origin and the watching brief was required because the drainage trench was excavated within the churchyard and adjacent to the church building itself. The location of the drainage trench was therefore considered archaeological sensitive, in particular it was considered possible that the excavation of the trench could result in the disturbance of human remains both articulated and disarticulated.

A faculty approving the works was issued by the Diocese of Lichfield with a condition for archaeological monitoring. In addition, a Written Scheme of Investigation (Martin-Bacon 2018) was submitted to and approved by the Staffordshire County Council Planning Archaeologist (SCC PA).

The archaeological monitoring took place during excavation of the entire drainage trench on the 24th May 2018. The watching brief resulted in the identification of a thick deposit of homogenous build-up material which sealed two possible grave cuts.

The archaeological monitoring was undertaken in accordance with the faculty issued by the Diocese of Lichfield and the WSI approved by the SCC PA and in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Code of Conduct. It also complied with the following documents:

- Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (CIfA 2014);
- Management of Archaeological Research Projects in the Historic Environment (Morphe, HE 2006).



2. Aims of the project:

The aim of the watching brief was to verify the presence or absence of archaeological remains, including human remains, which might be exposed by the groundworks. Should archaeological remains have been present the watching brief was intended to establish their significance and to provide a record of their date, nature and extent.

Specific objectives highlighted in the approved WSI were:

- To identify and record any features or deposits within the groundworks associated with phases of activity pre-dating the current church;
- To identify any deposits or features associated with the medieval development of the church and graveyard;
- To define the date, nature, extent and potential significance of archaeological remains within the area of groundworks;

- To consider any relevant research objectives contributing to a wider understanding of the archaeological context, and understanding of the topography of the site and its environs;
- To ensure that any human remains exposed, either articulated or disarticulated are appropriately recorded and dealt with;
- To identify any research themes relevant to the nature of the site which are contained within the West Midlands Regional Research Framework (Watt, 2011);
- Disseminate the results of the fieldwork through an appropriate level of reporting including potentially in period journals.

3. Methodology:

In accordance with the WSI all intrusive ground-breaking work using either a mechanical excavator and/or hand digging was archaeologically monitored. Where potential archaeological features were identified they were hand excavated and recorded in written, drawn and photographic format.

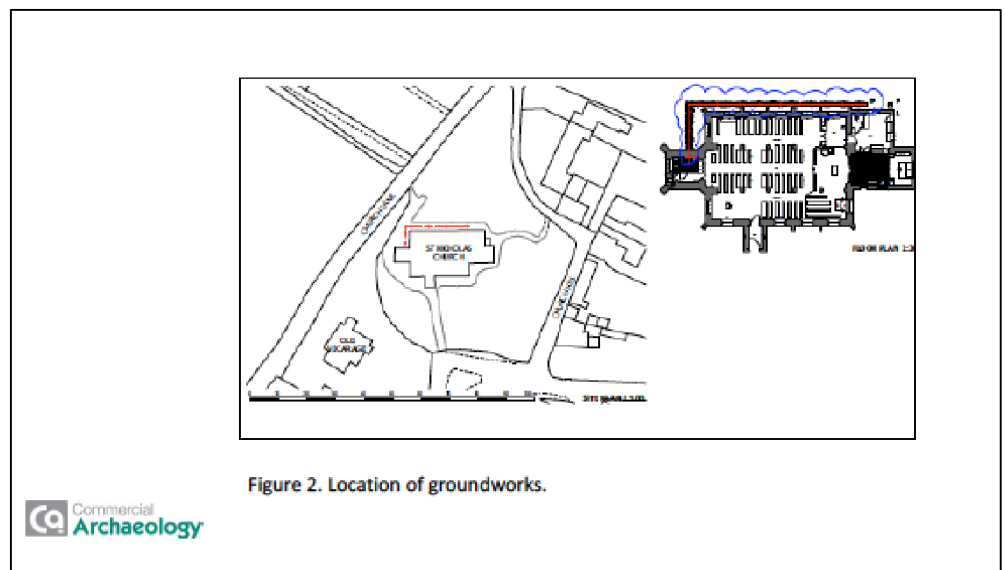


Figure 2. Location of groundworks.

Where human remains were encountered they were bagged, labelled and handed over to the PCC's representative on site for re-interment.

Soil samples were not taken due to an absence of dating material.

4. Historic Background:

It is likely that Codrall has early medieval origins. A settlement existed by the time of the Domesday Book (1086) where six households are recorded. It is likely that the original settlement was clustered around the St. Nicholas's Church on Church Hill. It has been considered possible that this extended as far south as the junction between Church Road and Church Lane both of which may have originated as back lanes during the medieval



period. As a result, the medieval layout has been fossilised around the church.

The Grade II* St. Nicholas's Church has a 12th century doorway and a 14th century tower which testify to the early origins of the settlement. From the mid-13th century Codsall manor was largely held by the dean of St. Peter's Church, Wolverhampton. A grade II listed timber-framed house survives adjacent to the church which has been dated to the 17th century. Other historic buildings survive around the church including the tower of an 18th century windmill and a former 19th century red brick school.

The South Staffordshire HEA identifies the area as having high evidential value which could contribute significantly to an understanding of the social and economic history of Codsall. Extant historic buildings may retain architectural fragments which could contribute to an understanding of their development whilst below ground remains would contribute to an understanding of phases of development of the medieval settlement.

5. Cartographic Evidence:

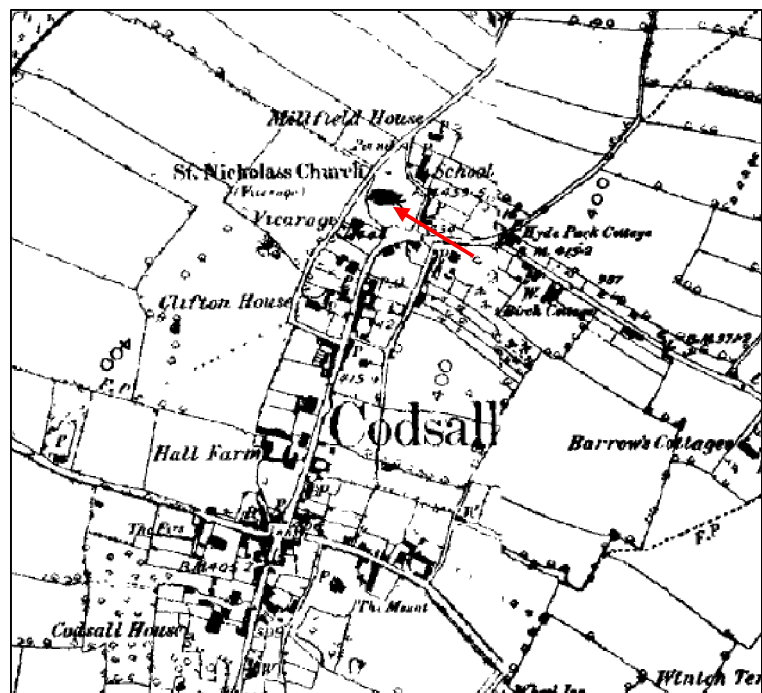


Figure 3 Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 1:10560 1882

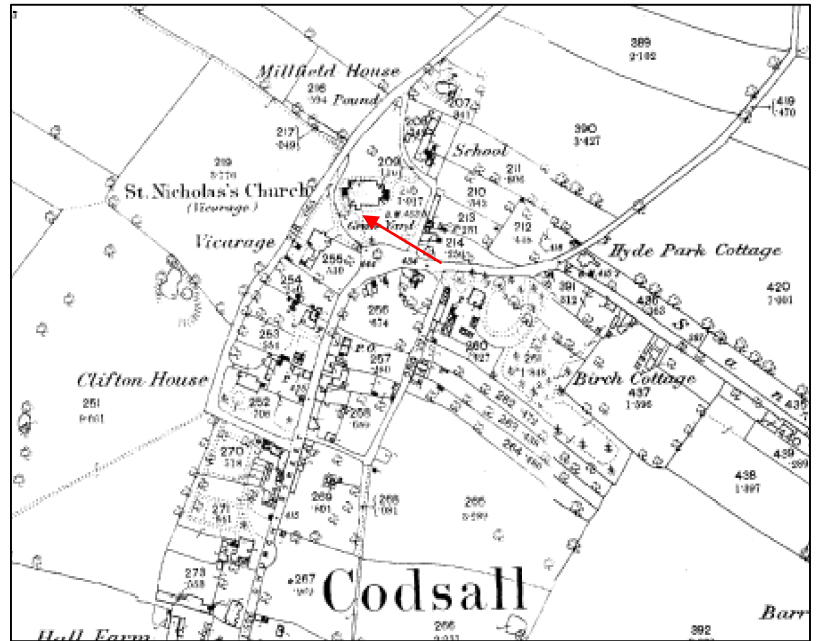


Figure 4 Ordnance Survey County Series: Staffordshire 1:2500 1884

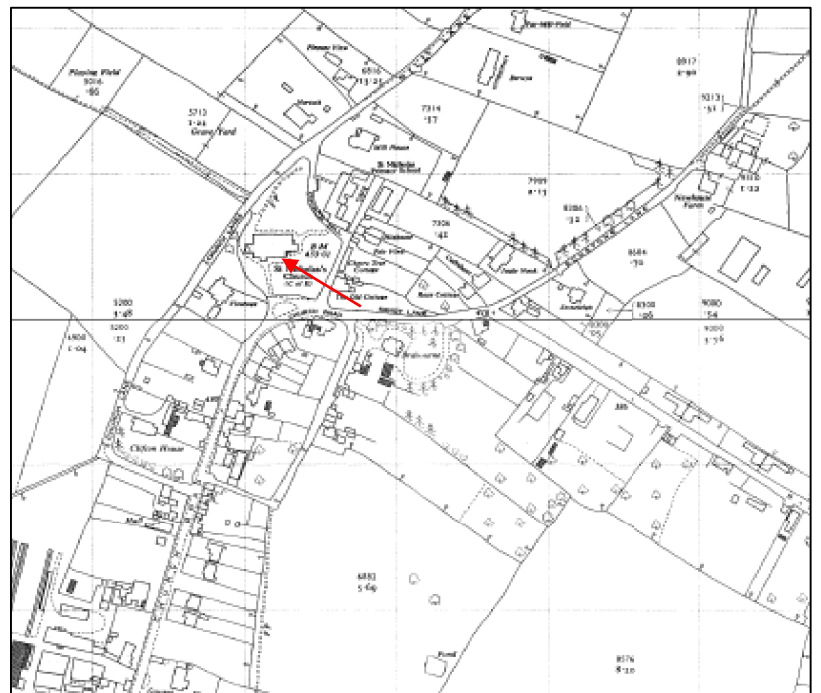


Figure 5 Ordnance Survey Plan 1:1500 1960-1962

The cartographic evidence suggests little change to the church or to the churchyard since the production of the 1882 map.



Figure 6 Sketch of St. Nicholas's Church as it was around 1797. Note the windmill in the background. This was converted to domestic use at some point before 1882.

6 Results:

The drainage trench measured approximately 0.5m wide by 26m length by 0.8m deep.



Plate 1. Drainage trench looking east.



Plate 2. Working shot at west end of drainage trench.

The stratigraphy comprised a thin layer of topsoil (1003) sealing a 0.7m deep deposit of homogenous mid-brown orangey sandy silt (1002) containing pebbles, occasional pieces of unworked sandstone, a miniscule amount of badly preserved fragmented human bone and several worked squared sandstones, one with architectural detailing (Plates 3 & 4). Deposit 1002 was devoid of any firm dating material.



Plate 3 showing deposit 1002 to a depth of approximately 0.8m.



Plate 4. Fragment of decorated stone work retrieved from deposit 1002.

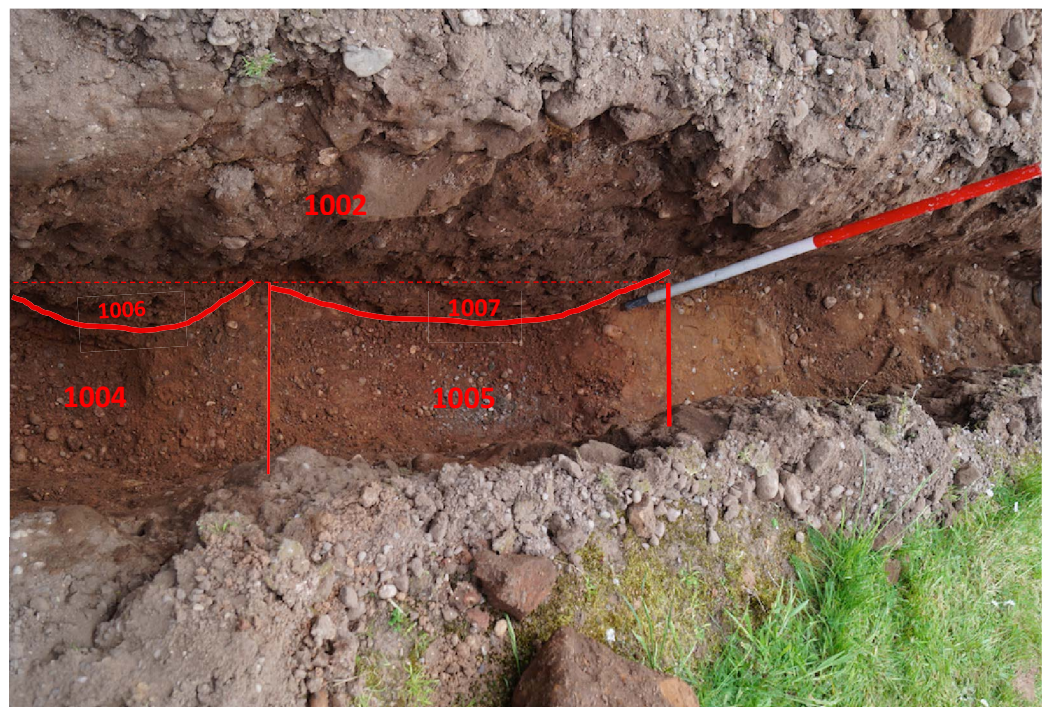
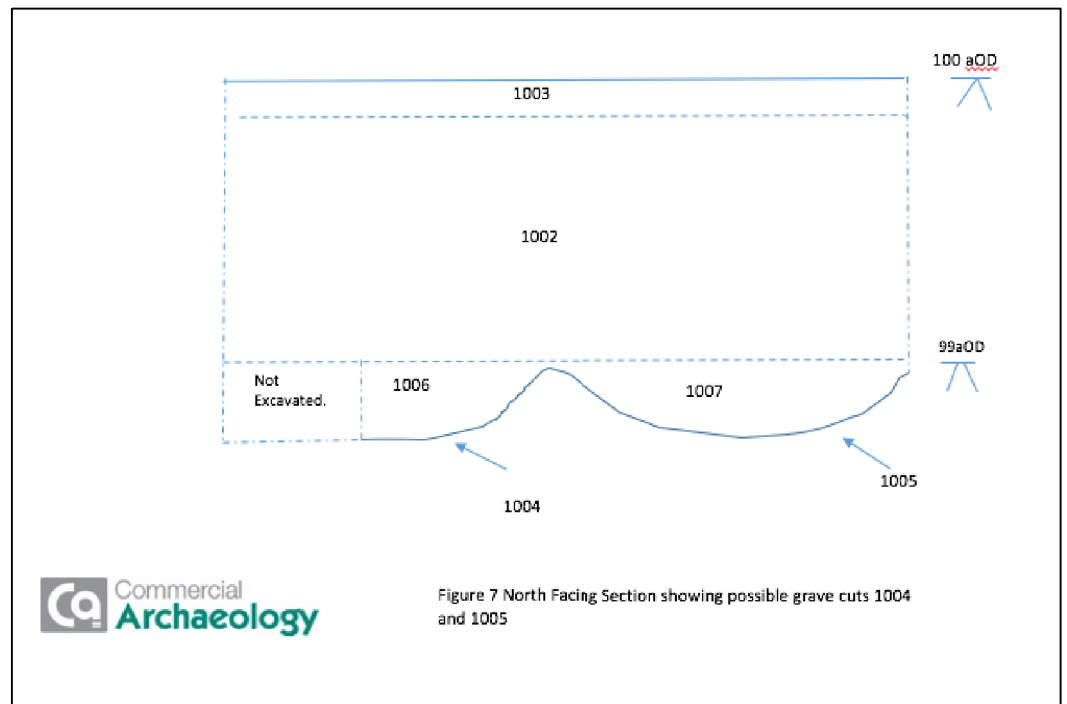


Plate 5. Oblique shot of grave cuts 1004 and 1005 sealed by deposit 1002.

Towards the centre of the trench along the north wall of the church (Plate 1) deposit 1002 sealed two possible grave cuts (1004 and 1005) cut into the natural sand and gravel (Figure 7, Plate 5).

Both cuts were only partially excavated due to restrictions from the confines of the trench and because they lay below the level of dig-depth for the trench. Cut 1004 was filled by a clean orange sandy silt (1006) but two fragments of very badly preserved human bone were visible in the section edge. One of the bones appeared to be a fragment of long bone and its orientation indicated that the grave cut was aligned east to west.

Cut 1005 was filled by an orange sandy silt (1007) identical to that found in grave cut 1004. Deposit 1007 did not contain any fragments of human bone.



7 Conclusion:

The watching brief on the drainage trench at St. Nicholas's Church in Codsall suggested that the level of the churchyard has been considerably raised by the importation of a deep layer of homogenous sandy silt, perhaps for the purposes of contending with historic over burials. Unfortunately, the layer did not yield any dating evidence nor, at least within the confines of the drainage trench, produce any human remains, disarticulated or articulated apart from a very small amount of fragmented, powdery bone which it was not possible to allocate to any particular skeletal feature.



It is however, possible that based upon the dates on gravestones cut into the layer in the vicinity of the trench, it dates to the 1700s.

The fragments of worked sandstone along with the unworked rubble sandstone found in this layer suggest that it may have incorporated demolition debris from a building nearby possibly constructed with ashlar facing and a rubble core. The presence of the architecturally embellished stone may indicate a higher status building.

The two possible grave cuts sealed by the previously discussed build-up layer were therefore likely to have a *terminus ante quem* of at least 1700. Given the depth at which they were located and their position next to the church wall they could be as early as the medieval period. Unfortunately, no dating material was retrieved which could confirm this. Throughout the excavation of the trench it was also the case that no evidence of coffin or coffin furniture was observed.

Given the sandy nature of the subsoil and of the overlying build-up layer it is likely that human bone has not survived well due to the acidity of the burial environment.

Although the watching brief resulted in a paucity of archaeological and artefactual material, in particular dating evidence it was successful in fulfilling at least two of the project aims.

The grave cuts may represent phases of activity pre-dating the current church or represent activity associated with the medieval development of the church and graveyard.

Helen Martin-Bacon, BA, MA, PgDip, MClfA (Principal Heritage Consultant Commercial Archaeology Ltd). May 2018.

8 References:

Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (ClfA 2014).

Management of Archaeological Research Projects in the Historic Environment (Morphe, HE 2006).

Written Scheme of Investigation for a Watching Brief. St Nicholas's Church, Codsall, Staffordshire. Commercial Archaeology Ltd (Martin-Bacon 2018).



HERITAGE SERVICES:

- Constraints reports for land acquisition.
- Desk-Based Assessments.
- Heritage Impact Assessments.
- Heritage Statements and Assessment of Significance.
- Listed Building and Scheduled Monument Consents.
- Historic Landscape Assessments.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans.
- Historic Building Recording.
- Setting Assessments.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES:

- Project Management and Set Up.
- Preparation of Methodologies.
- Scoping and negotiation with LPAs
- Preparation of Mitigation Strategies.
- Preparation of WSIs.
- Full range of Fieldwork Services.
- Consultancy and Advice.
- Preparation of Risk Assessments.
- PR & CSR/Public Outreach.

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