Report 2452

nps archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief at St Remigius' Church, Hethersett, Norfolk

ENF127268

Prepared for
Hethersett Parochial Church Council
c/o Birdsall, Swash and Blackman
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Location:	St Remigius' Church, Norwich Road, Hethersett
District:	South Norfolk
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Client:	Hethersett Parochial Church Council
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted for Hethersett Parochial Church Council during excavation ahead of remedial works on the drainage system at St Remigius' Church, Hethersett, Norfolk.

New drainage pipe runs and eight inspection pits were excavated around the perimeter of the church, across the north side of the churchyard and into a medieval hollow way which appears as a ditch-like feature. The hollow way, some disarticulated human bone and a few modern features were the only archaeological elements encountered during these works.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The drainage system at St Remigius Parish Church at Hethersett needed improving and a new drainage layout was designed by Birdsall, Swash and Blackman comprising pipes running from existing downpipes from the church roof, into eight inspection pits arrayed along the south, east and north sides of the church and thence draining northwards into the hollow way alongside the church (Fig. 1).

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Diocese Advisory Council and a Brief issued by Norfolk Historic Environment Services (Ref. CNF42750). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NPS/BAU2452/DW). This work was commissioned Birdsall, Swash and Blackman and funded by Hethersett Parochial Church Council.

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

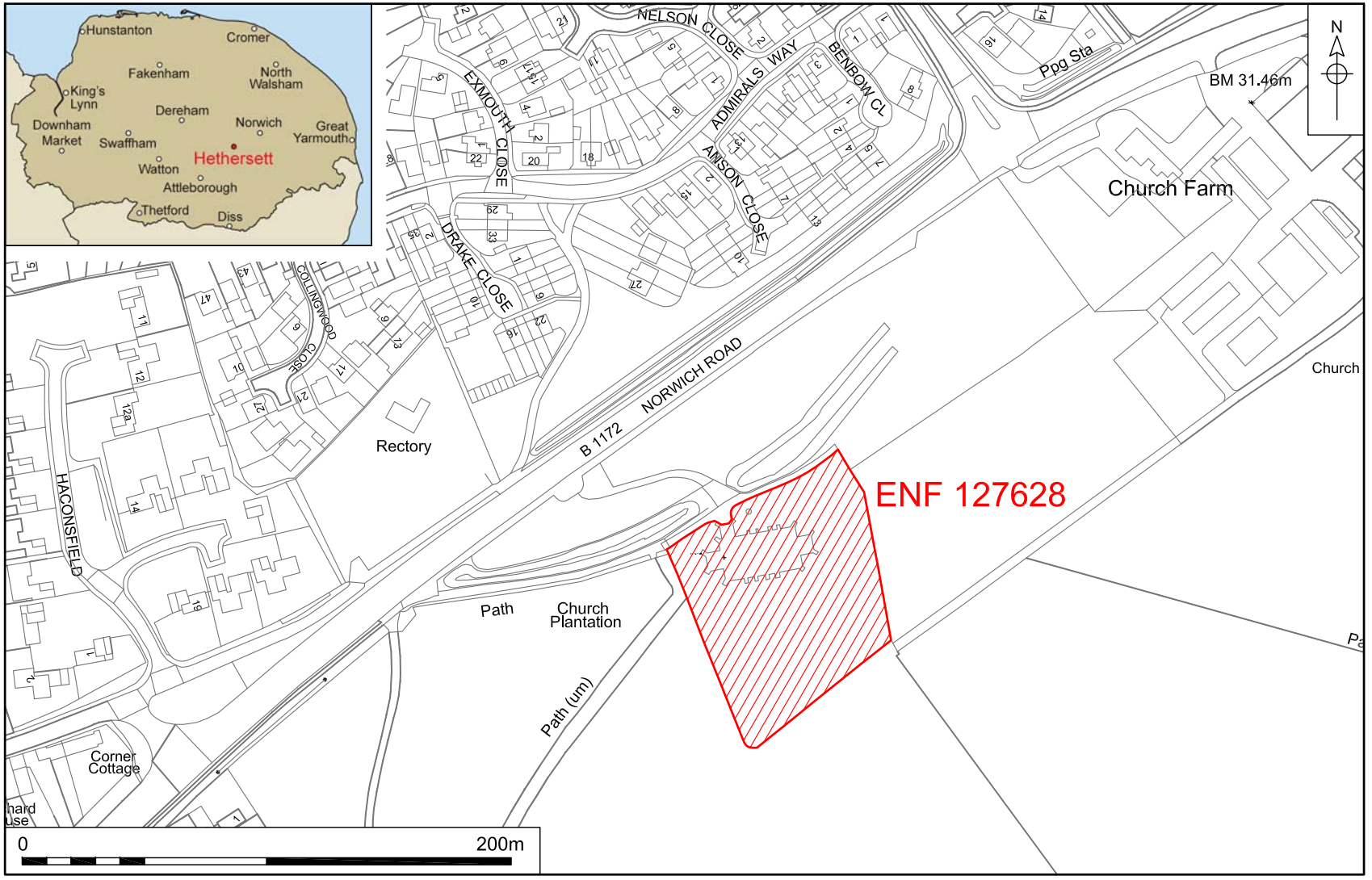

Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The bedrock in this area of Hethersett is recorded as consisting of chalk formations overlain by superficial deposits of the Happisburgh glacigenic and Lowestoft formations (undifferentiated) sands and gravels (http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/ geologyviewer _google/googleviewer.html).

The church is situated south of and close to a main road (B1172) with farmland on three sides. It appears to be well-drained; the 'ditch' which runs in a rough east-west direction along the north side of the churchyard is largely dry.

The topsoil [1] in the churchyard is a soft, homogeneous, dark grey silty-sand overlaid with turf with occasional small flint stones and a high level of root disturbance. The subsoil layer [2] in the churchyard is a light mixed orange-brown silty-sand of firm compaction with the occasional flint nodule, red brick pieces, chalk flecks and root disturbance. In some places the subsoil appears to have been highly disturbed by the excavation of graves in the past and contains a large amount of disarticulated human bone.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A search of the records in the vicinity of the churchyard held by Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) was made and the key results are summarised below

The church of St Remigius at Hethersett (NHER 9470) is a Grade II listed medieval parish church dating mainly to the 14th century and largely restored in 1874. Its original chancel was demolished in the mid 16th century and is shown on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey Map as 'Chancel (remains of)' (http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/Emap/EMapExplorer.asp?PID=9).

One of the most notable historic features which runs alongside the northern perimeter of the church is a medieval hollow way (MNF 14202), sometimes referred to as a Roman road although no evidence has been recorded to support a Roman date for this feature. It has the appearance of, and is often locally referred to as, a ditch but it represents the course of the old Norwich Road. There are two entries in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) with regard to this feature which are worth presenting here. The first is by E. Rose (Norfolk Archaeological Unit 1978) and states '[It is] narrower at the west end where it parallels approach to the church (and is filled in by a new car park) it broadens out to the east, curving round in a crescent shape but is very deep all the way and lined by old trees'. The second entry by H. Paterson (Norfolk County Council, Archaeology and Environment 1999) states that 'The sides of the hollow way adjacent to the car park have been 'landscaped' to the south with wooden horizontal post structures revetting the side interspersed with shrubs. To the north four ornamental trees have been planted. The remainder of the hollow to the east shows some areas eroded by cattle trampling, only two old trees remain on the side'. Today the hollow way resembles a ditch and it is into this that the new drainage system for the church empties.

A Grade II listed post-medieval cast iron water pump (SMR 34065/ MNF 38157) with a date of 1835 is located 200m south-west of the church (it was originally positioned 350m away and was moved in 1985).

Not many artefacts have been recorded from the area; one medieval Venetian coin was found in the church yard in 1963 (recorded under the same number as the church (NHER 9470); and a medieval pilgrim badge in the form of a female figure holding a feather and a branch was found at a property on the opposite side of the road, to the north of the church, in 1997 (NHER 33447). This evidence is consistent with the area being settled during the medieval period.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this watching brief was to mitigate the impacts of the proposed works. Where archaeological remains were identified, and could not be preserved *in situ*, the potential impact of the scheme was be minimised by appropriate levels of archaeological excavation and recording (preservation by record).

The Brief stated that monitoring was required on all drainage works in the churchyard (Fig. 2).

Excavations were undertaken by hand because of the difficulty that would be involved in accessing to the site with even a small mini-digger due to the presence of gravestones in the churchyard.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

No environmental samples were taken because no suitable deposits were encountered.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Colour, monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

The temporary benchmark used during the course of this work was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark with a value of 43.57m OD, located on the side of the church tower.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine weather with an occasional shower.

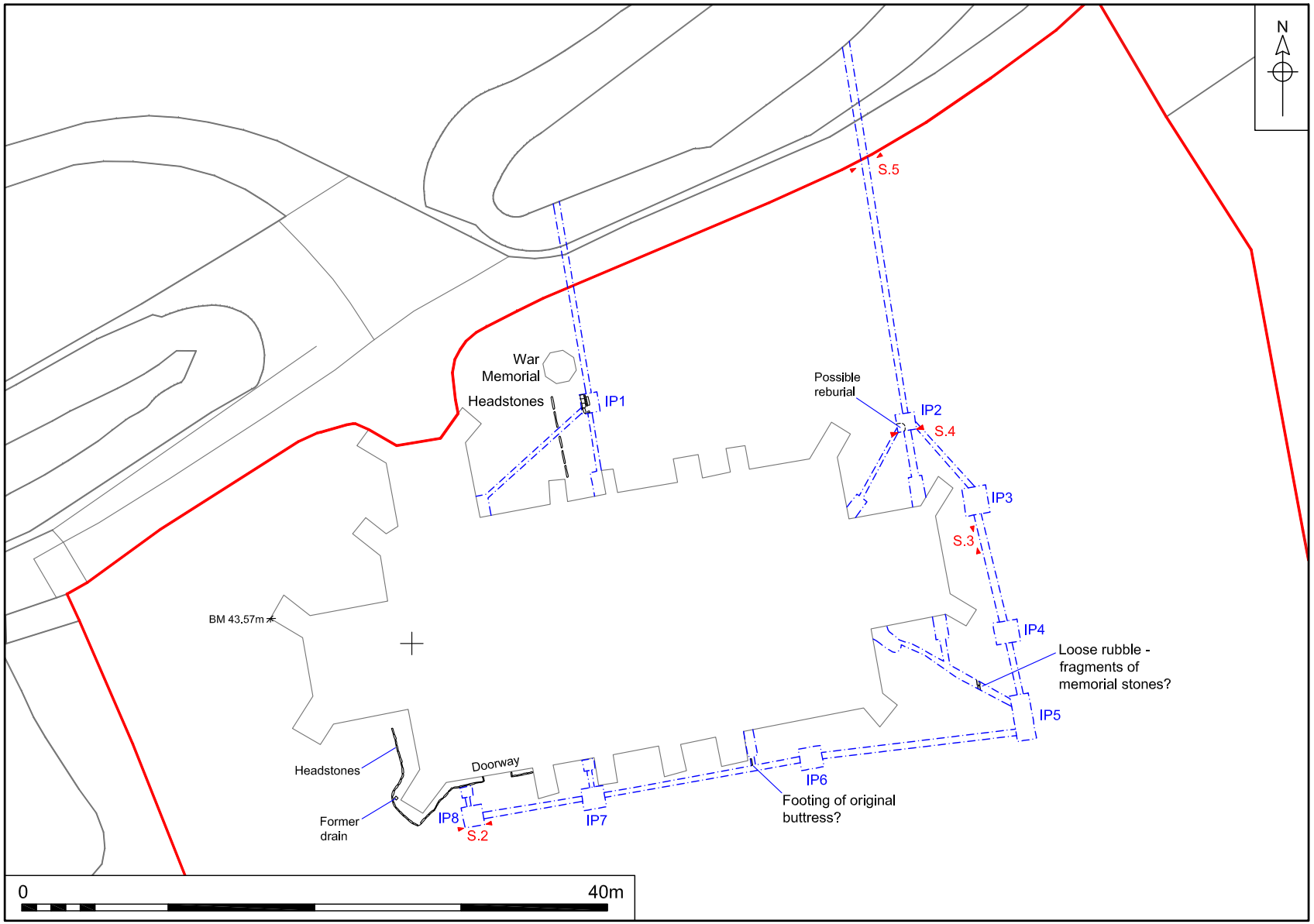

Figure 2. Plan showing location of new drainage works. Scale 1:400

5.0 RESULTS

Inspection Pit 1

Inspection Pit 1 (IP1) was excavated just to the south-east of the war memorial located on the north side of the church (Fig. 2). Narrow trenches for the drains were also excavated from two existing downpipes on the north side of the church (one at the corner of the church's porch and the other further east just behind a buttress). These trenches were approximately 0.30m wide and 0.35m deep and both ran into Inspection Pit 1. A length of modern drainage pipe was exposed in one of the trenches (Plate 1).

Plate 1. Trench from downpipe into Inspection Pit 1

Inspection Pit 1 measured 1.30m x 1.20m in area and was 0.75m deep. Underneath the turf and topsoil [1] was feature [8] consisting of paving stones laid on top of subsoil [2], beneath this was a small course of red brick and an old 'kerb' stone (like those utilised to mark the edge of a grave) which was lying at an angle (Plate 2). A fragment of disarticulated human skull was found here and the same type of modern drainage pipe that had previously been observed (Figs 3 and 4).

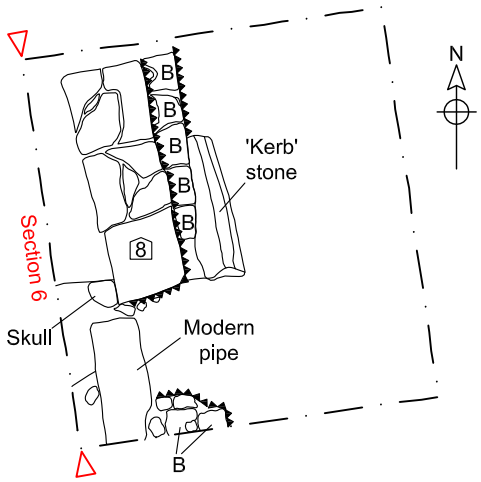

Figure 3. Plan of Inspection Pit 1. Scale 1:25

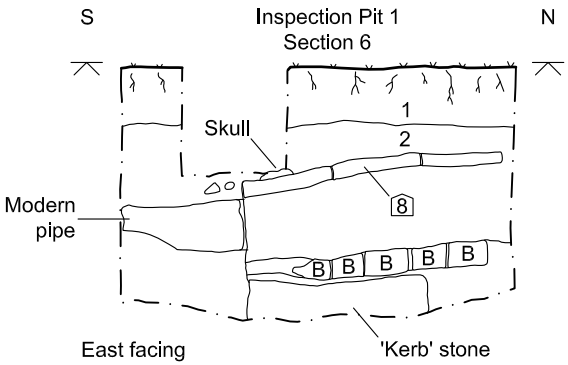

Figure 4. East facing section of Inspection Pit 1. Scale 1:25

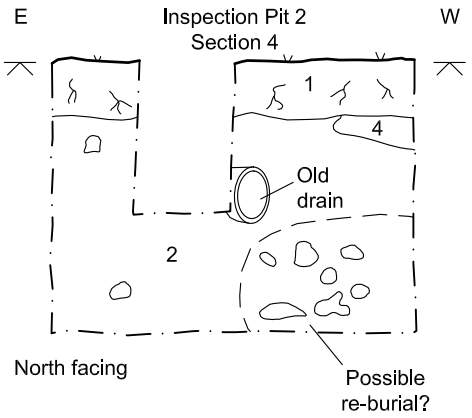

Figure 5. North facing section of Inspection Pit 2. Scale 1:25

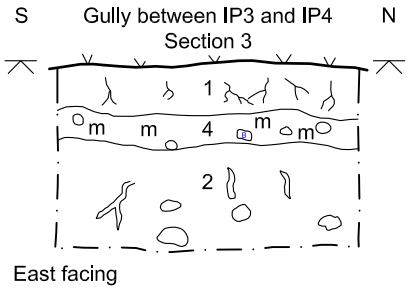

Figure 6. East facing section of gully between Pits 3 & 4. Scale 1:25

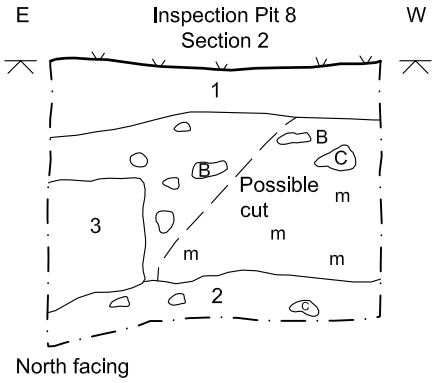

Figure 7. North facing section of Inspection Pit 8. Scale 1:25

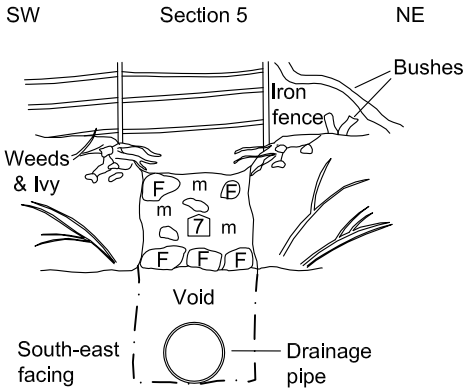

Figure 8. South-east facing section of bank showing flint wall [7]. Scale 1:25

Plate 2. Inspection Pit 1

Inspection Pit 2

Inspection Pit 2 (IP2) was excavated at the north-east corner of the church (Fig. 2). Three narrow drainage trenches fed into this inspection pit, two from existing downpipes on the church and the third from Inspection Pit 3. The inspection pit measured 1.20m x 1.20m in plan and was 0.90m deep; the trenches were approximately 0.30m wide and 0.30m deep. An earlier (modern) drain pipe appeared in this pit, as well as a deposit containing a large concentration of disarticulated human bone fragments [5]; no grave cut was identified. A small patch of crushed mortar and chalk pieces was also visible underneath the topsoil (Fig. 5).

Inspection Pit 3

Inspection Pit 3 (IP3) was located just to the east of the church (Fig. 2) and measured 1.23m x 1.20m in plan and was 0.80m deep. It was archaeologically sterile. A layer of crushed mortar, chalk and brick pieces [4] was recorded directly underneath the topsoil in the drain trench leading from Inspection Pit 4 into Inspection Pit 3 (Fig. 6).

Inspection Pit 4

Inspection Pit 4 (IP4) was positioned towards the south-east of the church (Fig. 2) to locate and remove an existing chamber related to the previous drainage system and to replace this with new pipe work. The pit measured 1.20m x 1.20m in plan and was 0.90m deep. The (modern) chamber was exposed and no archaeological evidence was encountered.

Inspection Pit 5

Inspection Pit 5 (IP5) was located to the south-east of the church; it measured approximately 1.30m x 3m in plan and was 0.80m deep (Fig. 2). It was enlarged in order to accommodate trenches running from the downpipes on the south side of the chancel (it was originally planned that these trenches would drain through Inspection Pit 4 but this arrangement was amended on site to avoid headstones and possible graves in this area). A few pieces of rubble that may have been associated with gravestones were encountered in the trench leading from the downpipes into this inspection pit (Fig. 2 for location).

Inspection Pit 6

Inspection Pit 6 (IP6) was located on the south side of the church (Fig. 2) and was, like Inspection Pit 4, also excavated to remove and renew the original drainage system (Plate 3). This pit measured approximately 1.50m x 1.50m in plan and was 0.70m deep. No archaeological remains were encountered, however in the trench leading from the downpipe on the south side of the church a large piece of worked stone was encountered (Plate 4) which may be the foundation of the original buttress or feasibly re-used stone utilised to form a base for the brick buttress (Plate 5).

Plate 3. Inspection Pit 6

Plate 4. Worked stone foundation of buttress?

Plate 5. Red brick replacement buttress, showing location of original

Inspection Pit 7

Inspection Pit 7 (IP7) also revealed the pipe work for the earlier drainage system (Fig. 2, Plate 6) and measured approximately 1.50m x 1.50m in plan and was 0.70m deep. No archaeological remains were encountered during the excavation of this pit and its associated trenches.

Plate 6. Inspection Pit 7

Inspection Pit 8

Inspection Pit 8 (IP8) was excavated at the south-west end of the church (Fig. 2), fairly close to a large vaulted grave. It measured approximately 1.30m x 1.20m in plan and was 0.90m deep. The subsoil appeared to have been highly disturbed by a possible grave and its grave fill [3] which contained brick and mortar pieces and flecks of chalk (Fig. 7, Plate 7). No other archaeological remains were encountered.

It is perhaps worth drawing attention to the arrangement of gravestones around the south-west buttress and nearby walls of the church. The ground level here has been reduced to almost one metre below the ground surface and the ‘outer’ edge lined with small headstones presumably moved from elsewhere in the churchyard (Fig. 2, Plate 8). It is possible that this was an attempt to channel water into a former drain that was located just west of the south-west buttress.

Plate 7. Inspection Pit 8

Plate 8. Headstone arrangement around former drainage works

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these works came from the trenches intended to drain water northwards from Inspection Pits 1 and 2 into the hollow way (ditch) (Fig. 2). These trenches were to be dug through a bank on the south-west side of the feature which was covered with weeds and bushes in order to reach the ditch. On excavation, a small flint and mortar wall [7] approximately 0.35m high was discovered within the bank (Fig. 8) which required the drainage pipe to be 'bored' underneath it. (Plate 9)

The trench leading northwards from Inspection Pit 1 also uncovered an old electricity cable (Plate 10).

Plate 9. The trench through the bank and into the 'hollow way'

Plate 10. The trench through the bank and into the 'hollow way'

6.0 FINDS

by Lucy Talbot

Finds were processed and recorded by count and weight, and an Excel spreadsheet was produced outlining broad dating. Each material type has been considered separately and is described below in date order. A list of all finds in context order can be found in Appendix 2a.

6.1 Pottery

Two sherds of late 19th- to 20th-century flowerpot weighing 45g were collected from subsoil [2].

6.2 Ceramic Building Material

Two examples of ceramic building material (CBM) were collected from the fill of possible feature [8], weighing 5,482g in total. The assemblage consists of a single fragment of late 19th-century, medium sandy brick and a complete 19th- to 20th-century buff coloured pamment floor tile.

Conclusions

These finds are sparse in number and were derived from unstratified or post-medieval contexts. As such there is little that can be concluded from their presence other than that they are typical of finds from rural Norfolk.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The tile and brick feature [8] encountered in Inspection Pit 1 is obviously of post-medieval date and may have been disturbed by the insertion of the previous drainage system or possibly it post-dates it. It lies in close proximity to the war memorial in the church yard, and from the slight rise around the monument it seems that the area has been landscaped. It may be that the tiles observed in the trench may have represented a former pathway or other hardstanding associated with the memorial.

The gravestones in the graveyard around the perimeter of the church appear to be in very straight lines and are very close together suggesting that they have been relocated from their original positions at some point in the past – a practice that was relatively common in the management of graveyards. The groundworks for the new drainage works were relatively shallow hence it was no surprise that no articulated burials were encountered. The presence of disarticulated human bone especially in Inspection Pit 2 indicates that this area has been disturbed in the past, most likely by earlier drains.

The presence of the layer of crushed chalky mortar [4] encountered on the east side of the church just underneath topsoil [1] may be representative of phases of demolition or construction associated with the church's chancel, which is known to have been demolished in the 16th century and rebuilt sometime in the 19th century.

The piece of worked stone encountered in the trench associated with Inspection Pit 6 (Plate 4) appears to be in the same location as the original buttress (four of the original buttresses south side of the church have been replaced/refaced with red brick. This piece of stone probably represents the footing for one of the original buttresses.

The flint and mortar wall [7] that was encountered when excavating the drainage trenches through the bank on the north side of the church could represent a churchyard boundary wall, possibly the base of the wall on to which is set a small iron fence or railings which can still be seen in some places.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Hethersett PCC who funded the work, Ruth Blackman of Birdsall, Swash and Blackman who commissioned it, the site staff of Lushers Ltd who undertook the groundworks and the Reverend Di Lammas and the churchwardens of St Remigius' church for their hospitality during the works.

David Whitmore produced the Project Design and managed the project.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Michelle Bull and Steve Hickling. The finds were washed and recorded by Lucy Talbot. The report was edited by Jayne Bown and produced by David Dobson.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description
1	Deposit			Topsoil
2	Deposit			Subsoil
3	Deposit			Possible grave backfill?
4	Deposit			Layer of mortar
5	Deposit			Fill of possible re-burial
6	Deposit			Mixed chalk/sub-soil deposit
7	Masonry			Flint 'boundary' wall
8	Masonry			Possible path feature

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
2	Pottery	1	45g	Post-medieval	Flowerpot
8	Ceramic Building Material	1	1,082g	Post-medieval	Brick frag.; Thickness: 63mm
8	Ceramic Building Material	1	4,400g	Post-medieval	Pamment tile; Dimensions L:203 x W:203 x TH:40mm

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	2
	Pottery	1