

Report 2774



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Archaeological Watching Brief at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Church Road, Yelverton, Norfolk

ENF128742



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Location:	St Mary the Virgin, Yelverton, Norfolk
District:	South Norfolk
Grid Ref.:	TG 2921 0218
Planning Ref.:	Pre application
HER No.:	ENF128742
OASIS Ref.:	127337
Client:	Andrew Morris
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted for Andrew Morris during groundworks associated with the installation of a new toilet and arch drain at the church of St Mary the Virgin, Yelverton.

The external works revealed very little of significance, partly due to the excavations being of insufficient depth to disturb burials. The building rubble encountered in both the topsoil and the subsoil may date from the rebuilding of the tower in 1674.

The internal works revealed the footings for the tower which may actually be the original medieval footings for the tower that were subsequently reused in 1674. The internal works also revealed a shallow trough of 18th- to 19th-century date (or later) containing a large amount of ash, suggesting that it had been associated with a stove, either to heat the base of the tower - if it was used as a vestry (before the present vestry was built) - or connected with a Victorian heating system.

The northern wall of the chancel contains a number of typically Saxon architectural features (one - possibly two - double-splayed windows, conglomerate quoins and a course of reused Roman brick), which combined with the absence of Norman motifs suggests that the church dates from before 1066.

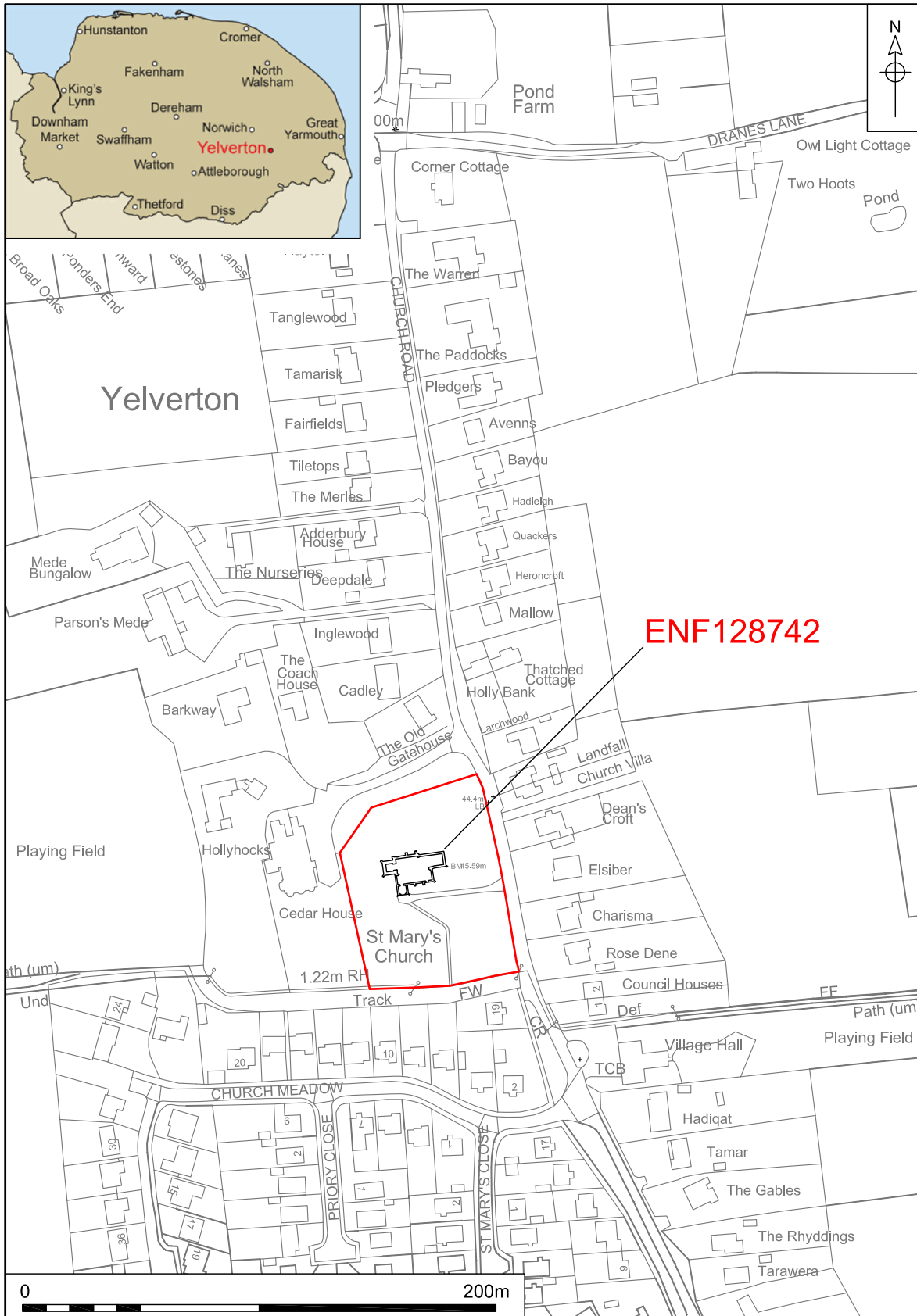
The use of Roman material in the masonry suggests that there may have been a Roman building in the vicinity which was used as a source of materials.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Archaeological monitoring took place on all groundworks associated with the installation of a new arch drain at Yelverton parish church (St Mary the Virgin). The works monitored included the arch drain, associated pipe trenches, a new water supply and the installation of a toilet within the west tower of the church.

This work was undertaken to fulfil planning requirements set by South Norfolk District Council prior to a planning application, and a Brief issued by Norfolk Historic Environment Service (Ref. CNF42794). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2774/DW). This work was commissioned by Birdsall, Swash and Blackman and funded by Yelverton Parish Council.

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area,



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

following the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).

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

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology consists of Anglian silts and clays (BGS 1991) above Cretaceous Upper Chalk and Quaternary Norwich Crag Formations (BGS 1985).

The church is located within a churchyard in the centre of the modern village, on flat ground at a height of c.44.5m OD on the west side of Church Road.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) and historic mapping resources founds on <http://historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk> have been consulted during the preparation of this section.

The church is set within an area of 20th-century development in the village, which is located in an area of formerly dispersed settlement. The church fabric contains re-used Roman tile, and Roman pottery has been found just to the north of the church, suggesting Roman occupation close by.

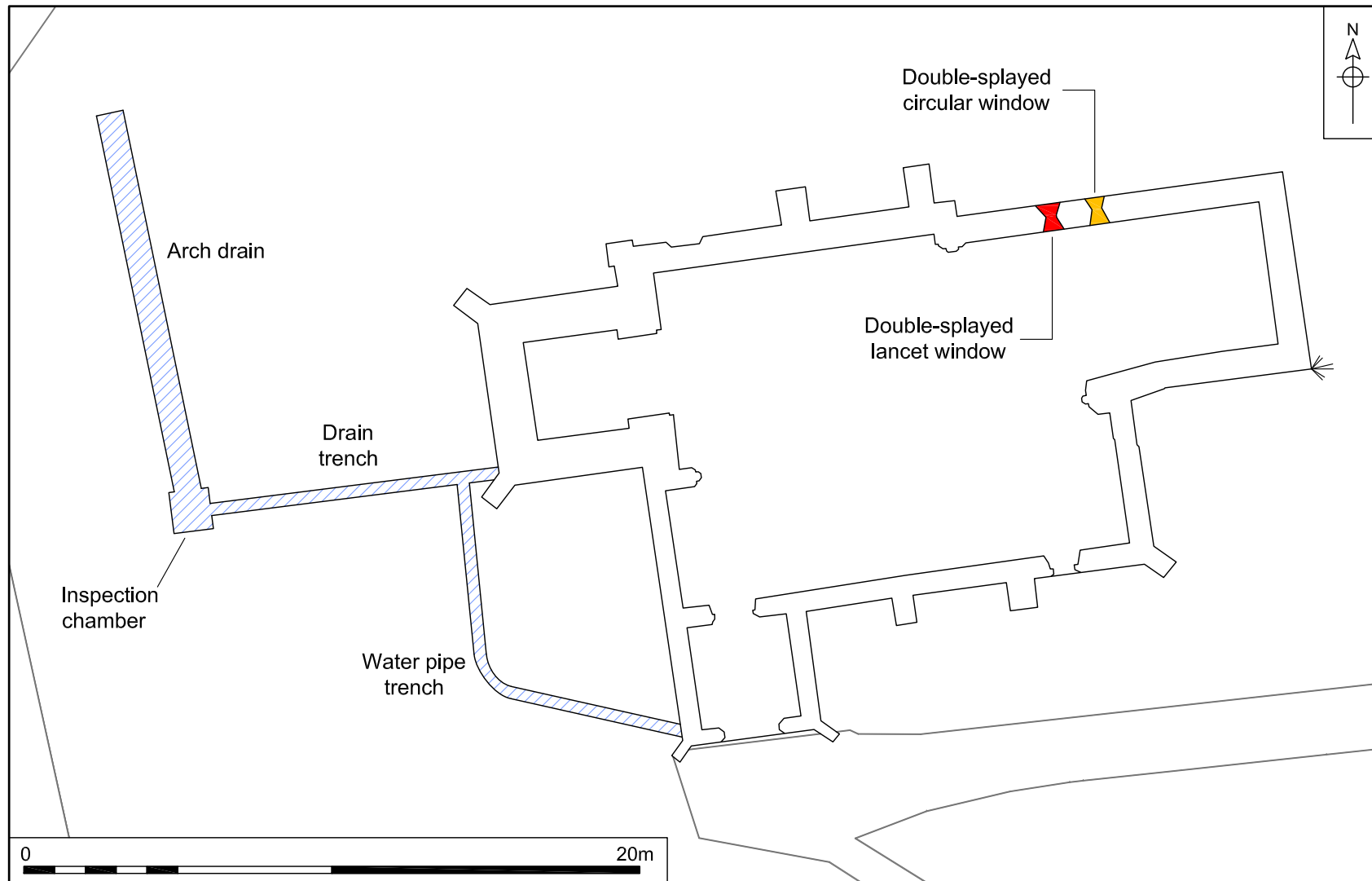
The church of St Mary The Virgin (NHER MNF12903) has been recorded as an early Norman structure, with a south aisle added in the 14th century and a tower rebuilt in 1674. The present author saw nothing in the fabric of the church which is specifically Norman in origin. The north wall of the Nave is probably Saxo-Norman with the eastern quoins being of conglomerate and flint. The north wall of the chancel shows a break in the masonry where the chancel has been extended eastwards. There are two early openings, a round window, now blocked, but probably originally double-splayed, and an open double-splayed round headed lancet window, both features being typically Saxon in date. Below these windows was a course of reused Roman tile, another typically Saxon feature. It is the author's opinion that this building dates from the great period of church building of the 10th-12th centuries and is most likely to be pre-1066 in date.

A Roman coin, pottery of Roman, Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date and human bone (NHER MNF32092) have been found in the garden of a house 50m north of the church.

Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval pottery (NHER MNF57710) have been found in the gardens of two more houses 70m to the north of the church.

Cropmarks of field boundaries and a road (NHER MNF58782) apparently leading to the church have been found on aerial photographs of fields 200m north-west of the church.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map (c.1885) shows very few houses in the area of the modern village, but rather a very dispersed settlement pattern. The vicarage lies to the west of the church (now the modern Cedar Lodge retirement home) with gardens to the north and west of the church. The Hall lies a short distance to the north-west.



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Figure 2. Plan showing location of external works and double-splayed windows. Scale 1:200

The Tithe map (c.1840) shows a similar pattern, but a few of the field boundaries are unfenced, and of a pattern which suggests piecemeal enclosure of openfield.

This theory is reinforced by the enclosure map (1801) which shows other relict openfield strips.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that all groundworks be monitored (Figs 2 and 3).

Machine excavation was carried out with a hydraulic 360° excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision.

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.

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.

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

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Internal Works

The internal works consisted of a shallow hole dug in the south-west internal corner of the tower, to facilitate drain runs out through the tower wall. The hole was 1.2m long, 0.8m wide and 0.37m deep (Fig. 3).

Once the present 9" pavement floor [1] was removed, a layer ([2]) of mid brown sand with frequent brick, tile and mortar rubble was encountered. This was sealing layer [3], a compacted mid brown sand with moderate brick and mortar fragments and structure [4] (Plate 1).

Structure [4] was constructed of what appeared to be reused floor bricks bonded with a white chalky mortar. The structure appeared to be a trough, possibly to contain fuel or fire debris from a stove. Its fill ([6]) was a dark brown ashy sand with frequent rubble fragments. Also revealed were the stepped footings ([5]) for the tower. These stepped out up to 0.08m and were constructed of flints held in a white chalky mortar. The footings for the west wall contained brick as well as flints.



Plate 1. Internal works facing west, showing structure [4]

5.2 External Works

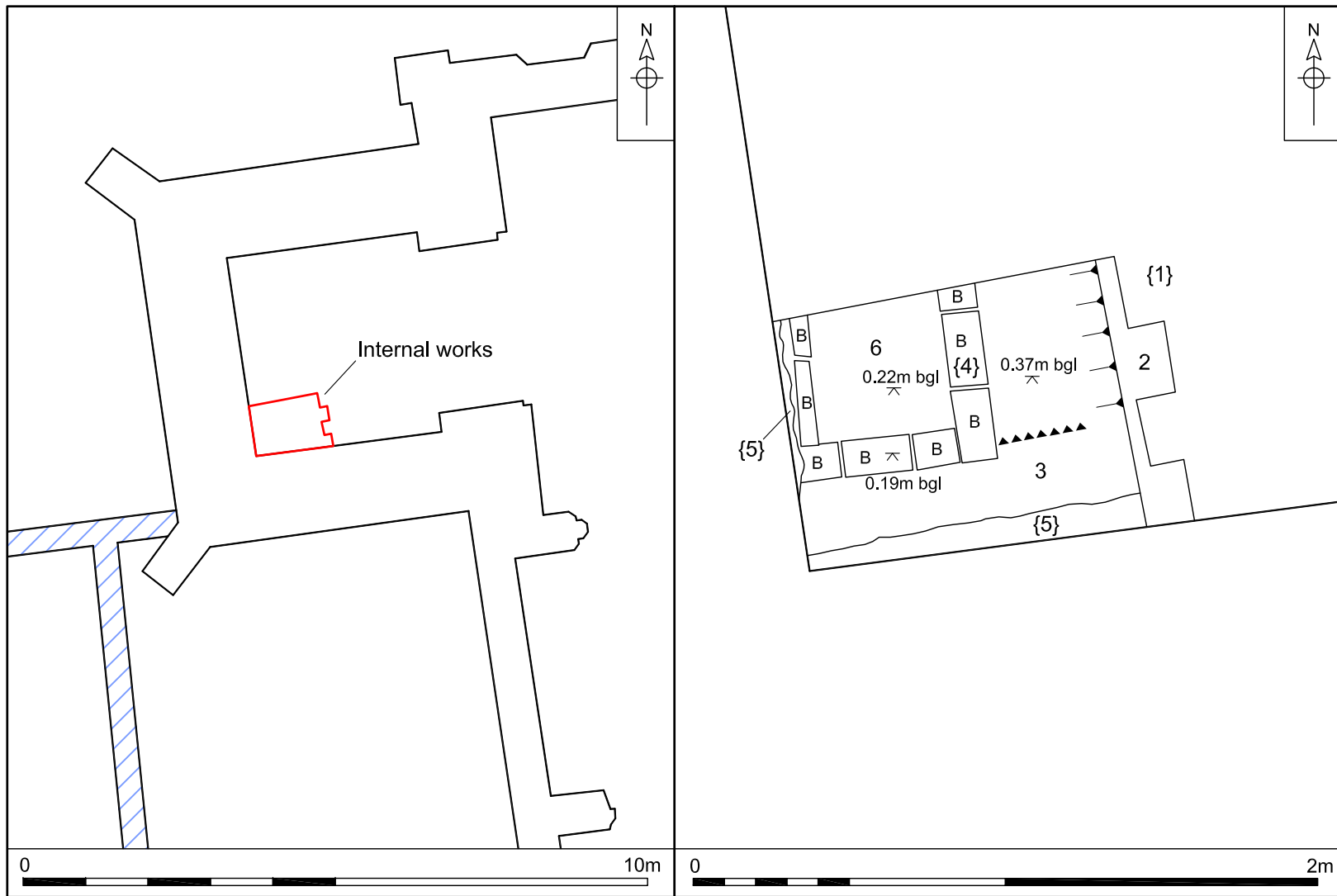
Three trenches were excavated; for a water pipe, drain and arch drain (Fig. 2).

Water pipe Trench

The trench for the water pipe was dug to take water from an extant stand pipe located by the west wall of the porch to the tower utilising the hole through the tower wall already made to take the drain pipe. The trench for the water pipe was 0.40m wide and 0.40m deep. The exposed stratigraphy- brown sandy clay subsoil. Both layers contained building rubble, probably associated with the rebuilding of the tower in 1674.

Drain Trench

The drain trench measured 0.40m wide and 0.45-0.60m deep, getting deeper towards the west. The stratigraphy was the same as that observed in the water pipe trench i.e. a 0.25m-deep layer of dark brown sandy silt topsoil above a yellowish-brown sandy clay subsoil.



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Figure 3. Plan showing location of internal works (left) and detail (right). Scale 1:100 and 1:20

Arch Drain

The arch drain measured 0.9m wide and 0.5m deep with identical stratigraphy as that observed in the other two trenches - 0.25m of dark brown sandy silt topsoil above yellowish-brown sandy clay subsoil.

6.0 FINDS

by Rebecca Sillwood

A very limited number and range of artefacts (brick and tile) were collected during this work. These finds were processed and recorded by count and weight, and an Excel spreadsheet was produced outlining broad dating. A list of the finds ordered by context number can be found in Appendix 2a.

6.1 Ceramic Building Material

A total of three fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) were recovered from two deposits.

A fragment of sandy red brick (1,119g) with large pebble inclusions, measuring 55mm in thickness was recovered from layer [2]. The brick fragment has no complete measurements apart from its thickness, which makes it difficult to place with any certainty, although the piece is similar to Drury's LB5 (late brick) in his typology of late bricks (1993, 165), and Ryan (1996, 95) places similar bricks (from Essex) in the late 17th-century to early 18th-century bracket.

The second brick fragment came from burnt brick structure [4], and is more orange in colour than the brick from layer [2], with a complete width of 115mm and thickness of 40mm. The piece is probably a re-used floor brick; its thickness indicates this, although many floor bricks are square, whereas this example is rectangular (more like a regular brick). The upper surface is much better finished than the underside, which is rough and unsmoothed, and rather worn. The likelihood is that this piece is later than the previously described example, and given the style of the piece, probably is of 18th- or 19th-century date.

The third piece of CBM consists of a fragment of plain roof tile, which along with the sandy red brick came from layer [2]. The piece is in a hard-fired sandy red fabric with large flint inclusions and a peg hole. No complete dimensions are available for this piece, apart from its thickness (114mm).

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Although the external works revealed very little of stratigraphic interest, partly due to the excavations being of insufficient depth to disturb burials, the building rubble encountered may date from the rebuilding of the tower in 1674. The internal works revealed the footings for the tower which may actually be the original medieval footings for the medieval tower that were reused in 1674. These footings were predominantly of flint (the brick in the western footings may suggest repairs during the rebuilding) and quite irregular in shape. The internal works also revealed a shallow trough of 18th- 19th-century date (or later) containing a large amount of ash, suggesting that it had been associated with a stove, either to heat the base of the tower if it was used as a vestry (before the present vestry was built), or connected with a Victorian heating system.

Unconnected directly with the monitoring of the excavations, the northern wall of the chancel was looked at, as there is an interesting double-splayed lancet window visible. It was noted that to the east of that window was a blocked circular window, possibly also double-splayed. Both window styles are typically Late Saxon in style and positioned to cast light onto the altar. Below these windows was a course of reused Roman tile, another typically Saxon feature (in imitation of Roman building methods and rarely used in later buildings). This feature, which does not continue further east than a change in masonry, suggests a later extension of the chancel. In addition, the north-eastern corner of the nave uses irregular blocks of conglomerate, rather than the imported limestone commonly used on Norman or later buildings. The combination of these architectural elements suggests a Late Saxon date for this building, rather than the early Norman date recorded in the NHER. The Saxo-Norman period saw a great number of what would become parish churches built (Morris 1990), but it is often difficult to differentiate whether such buildings originated pre- or post-1066, as Late Saxon styles continued in use for some time.

The use of Roman material in the masonry suggests that there may have been a Roman building in the area which was used as a source of materials.



Plate 2. The north wall of the chancel showing the double splayed lancet window, the blocked circular window to the left, the course of Roman brick below and the north-east corner of the nave

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Andrew Morris for commissioning this work through Birdsall, Swash and Blackman and for funding it. The volunteers undertaking the work s at the church must also be thanked for their co-operation.

Rob Brown monitored the external works; the author monitored the internal works.

The finds were processed, recorded and reported on by Rebecca Sillwood.

This report was illustrated and produced by David Dobson and edited by Jayne Bown.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Masonry		9 inch pavement floor	Post-medieval
2	Deposit		sand with rubble	Post-medieval
3	Deposit		compacted sand	Uncertain
4	Masonry		burnt brick structure	Post-medieval
5	Masonry		Tower footings	Medieval?
6	Deposit	4	ashy sand and rubble	Uncertain

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Category	Total
Medieval?	Foundation	1
Post-medieval	Floor	1
Post-medieval	Structure	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
2	Ceramic Building Material	1	1,119g	Post-medieval	Brick fragment
2	Ceramic Building Material	1	146g	Post-medieval	Roof tile fragment
4	Ceramic Building Material	1	1,105g	Post-medieval	Floor brick fragment

Appendix 2b: Oasis Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	3