

Report BAU2518



nau archaeology

## An Archaeological Watching Brief at St Stephen's Church, Norwich, Norfolk

HER 598  
ENF124333



**Prepared for**  
Reeve Property Restoration  
on behalf of St Stephen's Church



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August 2010



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Location: St Stephen's Church, Norwich, Norfolk  
Grid Ref: North TG 22942 08289; South TG 22932 08276  
HER No: 598; ENF 124333  
OASIS Ref.: 80624  
Client: Reeve Property Restoration for St Stephen's church  
Dates of Fieldwork: March 2010

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was conducted by NAU Archaeology in March 2010 for Reeve Property Restoration at St Stephen's Church during the demolition and reconstruction of a 13m length of retaining wall to the east of the church. The wall had a flint rubble core likely to be of post-medieval date. Repairs and maintenance over time meant little of this core had survived, most of the wall's fabric at the time of demolition consisting of red brick and cobbles. Documentary evidence suggests that the line of this wall defines a long-standing boundary of perhaps at least late 13th-century date; primary sources indicate that buildings of 15th- or 16th-century date occupied the eastern frontage of Malthouse Road until their destruction during the Second World War.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

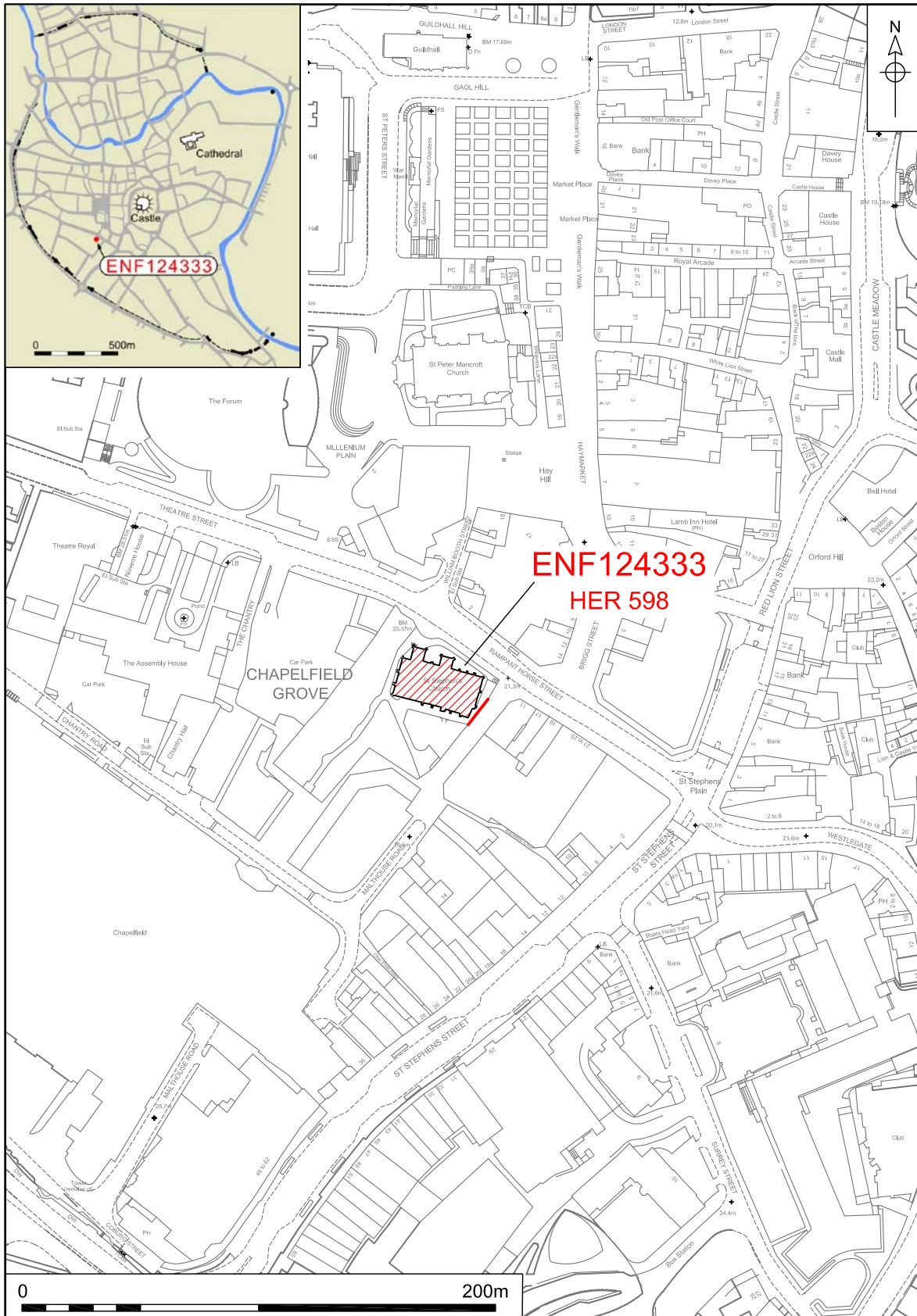
Figs 1 and 2

The watching brief monitoring at St Stephen's church observed the demolition of a 13m stretch of unsafe retaining wall that formed the eastern boundary of St Stephen's Church. The work was commissioned by Reeves Property Restoration and funded by St Stephens Church to fulfil a Brief issued by Norwich City Council (Ref. 09/01430/F). The archaeological works discharged statutory requirements in respect of this planning condition.

The watching brief was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. BAU2283/DW) for an excavation and watching brief during underpinning works. The watching brief was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the area affected by works to the retaining wall, following guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The site archive is currently held by NAU 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.

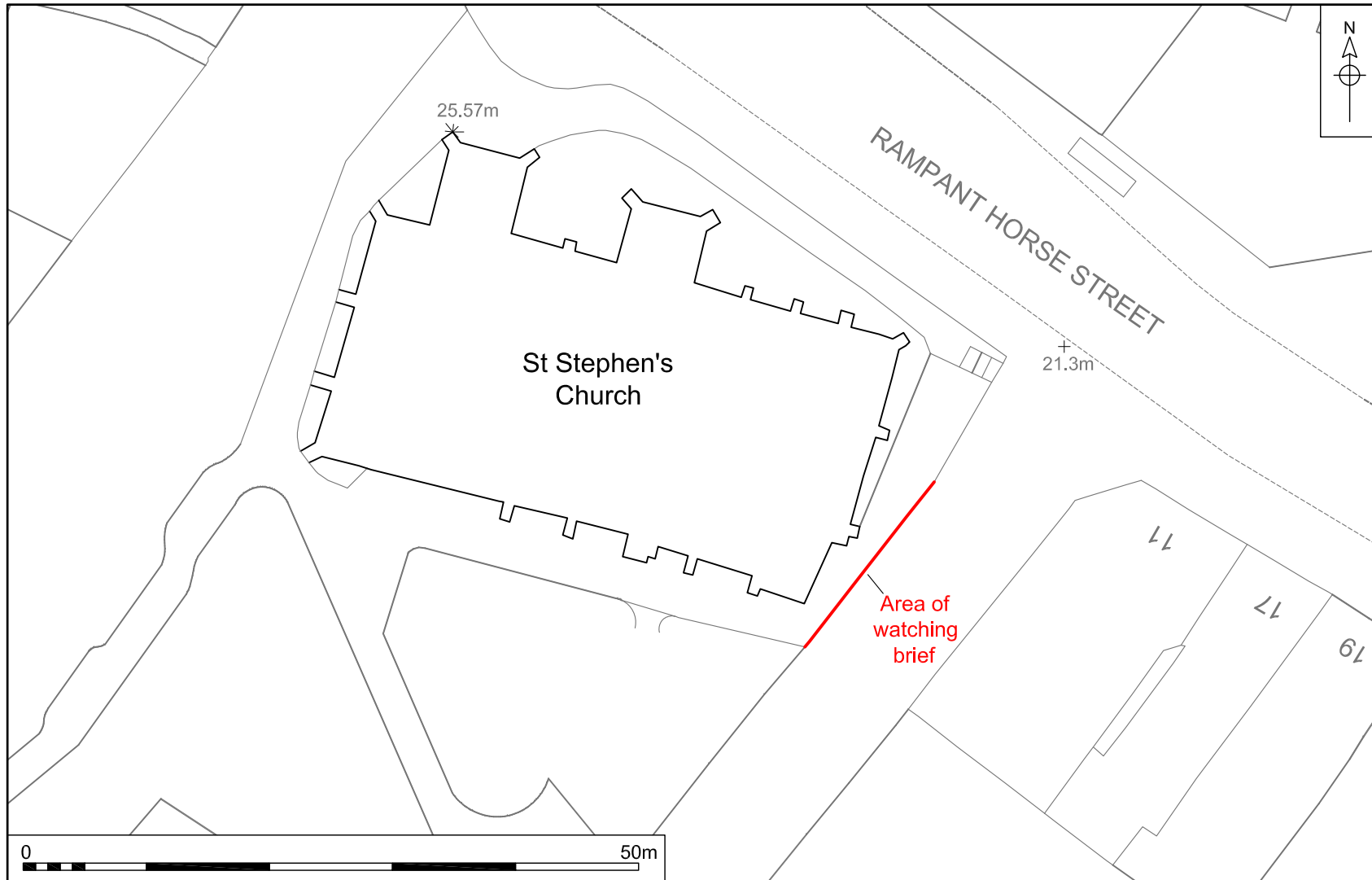
## **2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The Church of St Stephen is located in the south of Norwich west of Rampant Horse Street at a height of approximately 25m OD, and occupies the western edge of the valley of the Great Cockey, a minor watercourse that originated in this part of the city before flowing north to enter the River Wensum close to St Georges Street.



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500



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Figure 2. Area of watching brief. Scale 1:500

The underlying geology in this part of Norwich is Upper Chalk overlain by glacial sands and gravels of the Norwich crag. To the south-west of the site brickearths are present (British Geological Survey Sheet 161).

The setting of the church slopes down from west to east, the retaining wall that was subject to the watching brief sloping down from south to north.

To the south of St Stephen's Church lies the modern development of Chapelfield shopping centre while to the north is Theatre Street.

### **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

A more detailed background to the history of St Stephen's church is presented in an Assessment Report and Updated Project Design that covers recent archaeological investigations at the church (Adams 2010). For brevity only the salient aspects of this history are reproduced here.

The antiquarian Francis Blomefield (Blomefield 1806) states St Stephen's was a pre conquest foundation, though his assertion that it was founded as a 'parochial church for all the sick and needy that belonged to the castle' is confusing as the Castle is of post-conquest date. The earliest known reference for St Stephen's church dates to 1114 (Sandred and Lindström 1989). Blomefield states that St Stephen's "...was a rectory given by King Henry 1 (1100-1135) to the Convent and that this act was confirmed by Henry II" (1154-89).

The masonry of the church indicates several periods of construction that over time have added to the size and complexity of its layout. In its earliest form the church probably consisted of a nave and chancel. The presence of mid 14th-century masonry, particularly within the tower (Pevsner and Wilson 1997) identifies the core of the building as medieval, with the north and south aisles being later medieval additions.

Pevsner states that the chancel was built between 1521 and 1534 (Pevsner and Wilson *ibid*); the east window in the chancel has a date of 1533 within it. The church was also altered in the early 17th century with additions to the tower in 1601 (Pevsner and Wilson *ibid*).

The church of St Stephen's is notable for the number and variety of memorials occupying its walls, suggesting the parish was home to, or connected with, some of the wealthiest occupants of Norwich in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Malthouse Lane is a comparatively recent name for the street located immediately east of St Stephen's church. The 1905 Ordnance Survey map has the section of this street north of Chantry Road labelled as St Stephen's Back Street. This same section is documented in 1287 as a *communis venella*, a common lane (Sandred and Lindström 1989) suggesting some antiquity to its origin and alignment.

Plate 1 shows a pre-war image of the street, the buildings standing along the eastern frontage of what is now Malthouse Lane seeming to be of 16th- or even 15th-century construction (A Phelps pers. comm.). Sadly these buildings appear to have been destroyed in the Second World War, as shown in Plate 2 which is dated 1947. The southern part of Malthouse Street was indeed home to two malhouses, one either side of the street (Sandred and Lindström *ibid*).





Plate 1. St Stephens Street (now Malthouse Lane) looking north-west at ?late medieval buildings



Plate 2 St Stephens Street (now Malthouse Lane) looking north at demolished buildings

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The watching brief examined the demolition and removal of a 13m stretch of unsafe retaining wall and was carried out in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute for Archaeologists 2008) and the guidelines set out in the document *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

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.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits no environmental samples were taken.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU 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.



Plate 3. South end of wall, looking south, 1m scale. Image shows flint rubble core, later brick facing and repair

## 5.0 RESULTS

The demolition of wall [1] revealed its foundation [2] was c.0.30m in depth. The height of the wall varied from 1.70m at the southern end to 1.90m at the north end with a consistent width of 0.38m. The wall's construction comprised two elements, its original core and facings/repairs. The core of the wall was made from flint (cobbles and angular pieces of average 0.10m diameter) bonded with a pale yellow lime mortar.

This part of the construction appeared to contain no other types of building material. This core was most clearly demonstrated at the south end of the wall (Plate 3).



Plate 4. Wall during demolition, looking north-west, 1m scale

The core made up a comparatively small proportion of the wall, as it had been added to by later facing and repair in red brick. (Plates 3, 4 and 5)

The eastern elevation had been covered in a cement render but demolition revealed that this elevation at its southern end contained an area of facing of flint cobbles (Plate 5) perhaps in the form of a panel.



Plate 5. Wall during demolition looking north-west, with cobble panel within brickwork

The construction cut of the wall [2] was cut into undisturbed geological soils along its entire length, with no underlying features observed. No developed soils were present along the western edge of this and the heights of the material here were similar to the current level of Malthouse Road.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief carried out during the demolition of the wall at St Stephen's church provided little indication of its construction date, but documentary evidence suggests a street or path of some sort might have been present to the immediate east of the church since the late 13th century, with photographic primary evidence for buildings of perhaps late medieval date fronting onto this street. These sources suggest that the present eastern boundary of the church might have been in place since perhaps the medieval period. It was; however, not possible to support this premise with artefactual or stratigraphic evidence from archaeological remains revealed by the demolition works.

One tentative suggestion as to a date for the flint/rubble core of the wall is that it is contemporary with the early 16th-century extension east of the chancel (Pevsner and Wilson 1997). At the time these works took place it is likely that the area to the east of the gable wall (west of the demolished wall) was truncated to the height of undisturbed geological deposits (Adams 2010). Perhaps the undertaking of these works on the church provided a good opportunity to re-establish the boundary.

## **Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was undertaken by the author. The brief was prepared by Norwich City Council. Gary Greengrass of Reeve Property Restoration assisted on site and Jason Menezes managed the project on behalf of Bidwells LLP.

Sarah Howard of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology provided the ENF site code.

Sarah Percival formatted the appendices for the report which was edited by Jayne Bown and illustrated by David Dobson.

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### Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Masonry		2	Boundary Wall	Post-medieval
2	Cut	Wall		Construction cut	Post-medieval

### Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Type	
Post-medieval	Wall	1