

St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds BSE 451

Archaeological Monitoring Report

SCCAS Report No. 2014/095

Client: The PCC of St Mary's Church

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August/2014

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St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds

BSE 451

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Any opinions expressed in this report about the need for further archaeological work are those of the Field Projects Team alone. Ultimately the need for further work will be determined by the Local Planning Authority and its Archaeological Advisors when a planning application is registered. Suffolk County Council's archaeological contracting services cannot accept responsibility for inconvenience caused to the clients should the Planning Authority take a different view to that expressed in the report.

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Date: 2014

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

Summary

During the relocation of the Cenotaph in the north aisle of St Mary's church the existing flagstones at the new location were lifted as well as a layer of rubble in white lime mortar, which had been laid as a sub-base in the 19th century; this exposed a substantial flint and mortar wall, which was on a similar alignment to the standing building. It is believed to be the original north wall of the smaller Norman church built in the 12th century, which was reduced to ground level when the nave and north aisle of St Mary's were widened early in the 15th century. A projection of this wall to the west would abutt the south-east corner of the church tower (in the Norman period the tower entirely projected from the north wall of the church whereas following the expansion of the church and nave, the tower became partly encased within the north aisle).




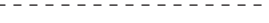







Either side of the wall stub in the excavation area the ground was disturbed with up-cast soil from multiple burials. A layer of mortar in the shape of a medieval tomb, although not complete, lay directly over brown silt and may indicate an intact burial where an attempt was made to replicate a medieval stone-lined tomb albeit on a modest scale. Disarticulated skeletal remains that were uncovered during the work were reinterred and a protective membrane was laid over the wall. Reinforced concrete was then placed over the wall where the Cenotaph was successfully relocated.

Drawing Conventions

Plans

- Limit of Excavation 
- Features 
- Break of Slope 
- Features - Conjectured 
- Natural Features 
- Sondages/Machine Strip 
- Intrusion/Truncation 
- Illustrated Section  S.14
- Cut Number 
- Archaeological Features 

Sections

- Limit of Excavation 
- Cut 
- Modern Cut 
- Cut - Conjectured 
- Deposit Horizon 
- Deposit Horizon - Conjectured 
- Intrusion/Truncation 
- Top of Natural 
- Top Surface 
- Break in Section 
- Cut Number 
- Deposit Number 0007
- Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45\text{m OD}}{\times}$

1. Introduction

In order to consolidate the space within St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds, a church dedicated to the Suffolk Regiment and to the two World Wars it was decided to relocate the Cenotaph from the western end of the north aisle to the Chapel of the East Anglian Regiment, at the eastern end. The weight of the monument made a structural assessment of the new location essential and a mitigation strategy, likely to involve reinforcements to support the Cenotaph, put in place. The investigation of the site, with the potential to expose deposits of archaeological interest, led to the requirement for an archaeologist to be present during the works. The Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service field team was commissioned by the Whitworth Co-partnership to carry out the work.

2. Archaeology and historical background

Like most active churches little is known of the archaeology of St Mary's. Documentary evidence records the building of a Norman church on this site during the 12th century at the time of Abbot Anselm who promoted extensive construction at this time including that of the town bank and ditch. The wealth of medieval communities was often displayed in the parish church and St Mary's was extensively rebuilt in the decorated style and an early tower was refashioned at the beginning of the 14th century. The church was lengthened and widened in the first part of the 15th century. While the building suffered during the reformation the Victorians did much to restore what had clearly been an exceptional parish church, one of the finest in Suffolk.

The Cenotaph was to be re-sited in the area of Jankyn Smith's chantry, the latter being one of the foremost benefactors of the church and of the town in the 15th century.

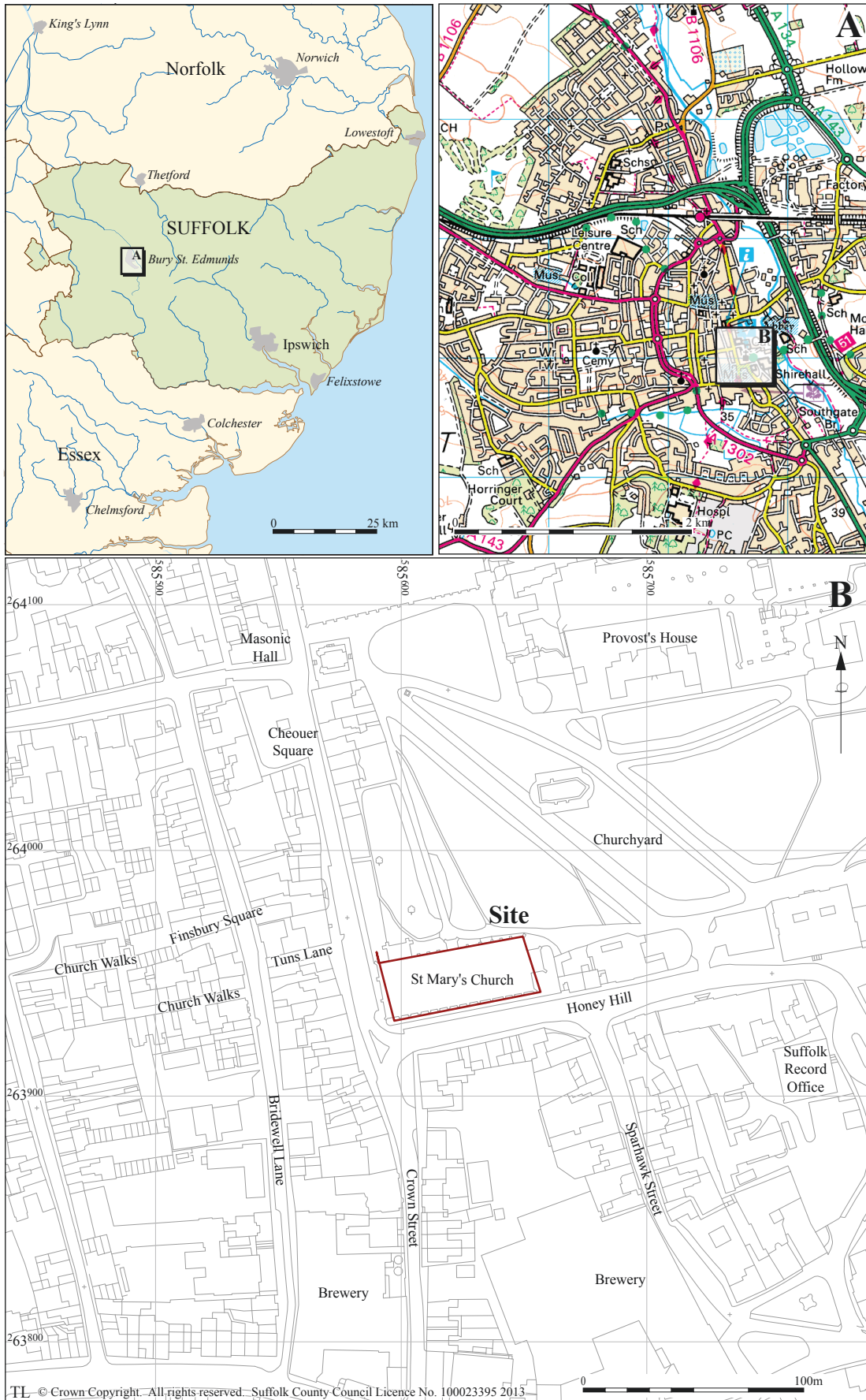


Figure 1. Site location plan.



Figure 2. Detailed excavation plan

3. Results

Several monitoring visits were made to the church with the main work concentrated over two days after the flagstones had been lifted on the planned location for the Cenotaph. There was a bedding of lime mortar that contained a high proportion of flint but included occasional tile fragments and brick. It was found to be a quite solid base for the flagstones and was almost certainly laid during the 19th century; sample holes were made using a pneumatic drill and although firm this layer varied in depth and required removal which was achieved by a combination of hand excavation and drilling. It became clear that there was an older fabric of cream coloured mortar which was mixed with flints of moderate size (up to c.0.10m across) beneath. This was exposed revealing a medieval wall, 0001, that was c.0.9m wide. The surrounding rubble was cleaned away, which left the wall up to 0.15m upstanding above a disturbed brown silt surface (Fig. 1).

Either side of the wall the silt was quite soft and occasional fragments of human bone were evidence that burials were located here with intercutting graves causing bones to be up-cast. Worthy of particular mention was an undamaged skull found to the south of the newly exposed wall (Fig.1); the skull was only c.0.2m below the top of the wall stub and may have been displaced although this could not be confirmed without further excavation and it was covered over. To the north, and tight against the stub wall, a probable grave was visible, which stood out as an area of silt with a higher gravel content (Grave 1). A second likely grave appeared as an area of mortar spread over the brown silty surface in the approximate shape of a grave; in the northwest corner a small area of limestone was visible (during excavations at 'Norman Cottage', BSE 182, twenty seven bodies had been buried in a space measuring 4x 5m alongside the Norman Tower and limestone had been used, along with mortar, to construct grave linings). The limestone may have been the remains of a reused stone lid from an earlier tomb that was laid directly onto the soil although this could not be confirmed.

Only a small gap was exposed between the flagstones that underlay the cenotaph after its removal which exposed a course of red bricks with an orange brown sand/silt on either side. The ground is likely to have been disturbed but the bricks could indicate the edge of a burial vault although this could not be confirmed and the hole was made good.



Plate 1. Looking west along the buried wall with two probable graves; Grave 1 is at the bottom right of the picture, grave 2 is middle right and outlined in mortar, the skull lies concealed beneath a piece of wood in the top left. The scale is 1m.



Plate 2. Looking east over Grave 2 with the buried wall to the right. The scale is 1m.



Figure 3. Projection of the stub wall onto a plan of St Mary's indicating the likely course of the Norman wall in relation to the tower and the Norman frontage of the church as suggested by Claire Paine (per.con.).

4. Discussion

An interpretation of the stub of the substantial flint and mortar wall appears in Figure 3. It is believed to be the original north wall of the smaller Norman church built in the 12th century and reduced to ground level when the nave and north aisle of St Mary's was widened early in the 15th century. This earlier wall line provides a more symmetrical fit with the church tower, which would have stood as an adjunct to the north west corner of the church, rather than being partially inside as it became in the later medieval period.

Either side of the wall stub the ground was disturbed with up-cast soil probably from multiple burials. A layer of mortar in the shape of a medieval tomb, although not complete, lay directly over brown silt and may indicate the site of an intact burial and where an attempt was made to replicate a medieval stone-lined tomb albeit on a modest scale. The suggested burials, Grave 0002 and 0003, were probably the most recent in this area with earlier cut lines obscured. Establishing the number and date of burials within this part of the church was not within the remit of the excavation but it is likely to have been quite dense given the disarticulated human remains that were found and reburied.

5. Archive deposition

Paper and photographic archive: SCCAS Bury St Edmunds

Digital archive: SCCAS R:\Environmental Protection\Conservation\Archaeology\Archive\Ipswich\

Digital photographic archive: SCCAS R:\Environmental Protection\Conservation\Archaeology\Catalogues\Photos

6. Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by Andrew Tester who also wrote the report and managed by David Gill. The author is grateful to Clive Payne who commented on the work while in progress. The report illustrations were created by Beata Wieczorek-Olesky and the report was edited by Richenda Goffin.

7. Bibliography

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