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**An Archaeological Watching Brief
at the Church of St Peter and St Paul,
Great Bowden, Leicestershire**

NGR: SP7462 8887

Jennifer Browning and Jon Coward



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**For
Great Bowden PCC**

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Great Bowden, Leicestershire NGR SP 7462 8887 during the underpinning of the north wall. The work has produced evidence for structures and burials that pre-date the current arrangement of the building, including the remains of a wall foundation, which possibly represents a former buttress. The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council under the Accession Number X. A63 2012.

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by ULAS in June and July 2012 on the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Great Bowden, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 7462 8887). This was undertaken during the groundworks for underpinning part of the north side of the Church and was commissioned by Great Bowden PCC. The work was required by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor in order to assess the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits which might be present.

2. Site Description, Topography and Geology

The Church lies to the north-east of a triangular green, on mainly flat ground. It is orientated east-west, and surrounded by a graveyard. The British Geology Survey indicates that the site lies over Blue Lias and Mudstone.

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

The village of Great Bowden is located on the south-eastern edge of Leicestershire, 1.5 miles from the centre of Market Harborough and approximately 16 miles from Leicester.

In 1086 Great Bowden was the centre of a large soke (a subordinate unit to a mother parish), which included lands in twelve other Leicestershire villages. The origins of the soke are unknown, but it appears to have existed under Edward the Confessor. Great Bowden soke is mentioned in 1173, but not subsequently, and nothing is known of its organization. Part of its territories evolved into a separate entity known as the soke of Stretton (McKinley 1964).

The Church of St. Peter and St Paul is a Grade I listed building (List Entry No: 1061277) and is described in summary as a 13th- 15th century parish church, with 18th century porches and low-key restoration by Talbot Brown and Fisher 1886-87.

The oldest fabric of the church dates from the 13th century and it is thought that the early building was similar in plan to the current one, with the exception of the north chapel, probably added in the 15th century (McKinley 1964). However, considerable alterations have been made to the church over the years, the tower is likely to be of 14th century date and in the 15th century the aisles were raised, the arcades rebuilt and clerestories added. The listing description notes that this work included rebuilding of the nave and aisles. In the late 18th century, a vertical crack was noted in the tower and a number of repairs and alterations took

place at this time, including the building of the south porch. The north porch was constructed in 1790, at the same time as the installation of a gallery and new box pews. The church appears to have been well-maintained into the 19th century and major restorations took place in 1886-7 (McKinley 1964).



Figure 1: Location of Church within Great Bowden.
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4. Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the archaeological work was:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
- To advance understanding of the heritage assets
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

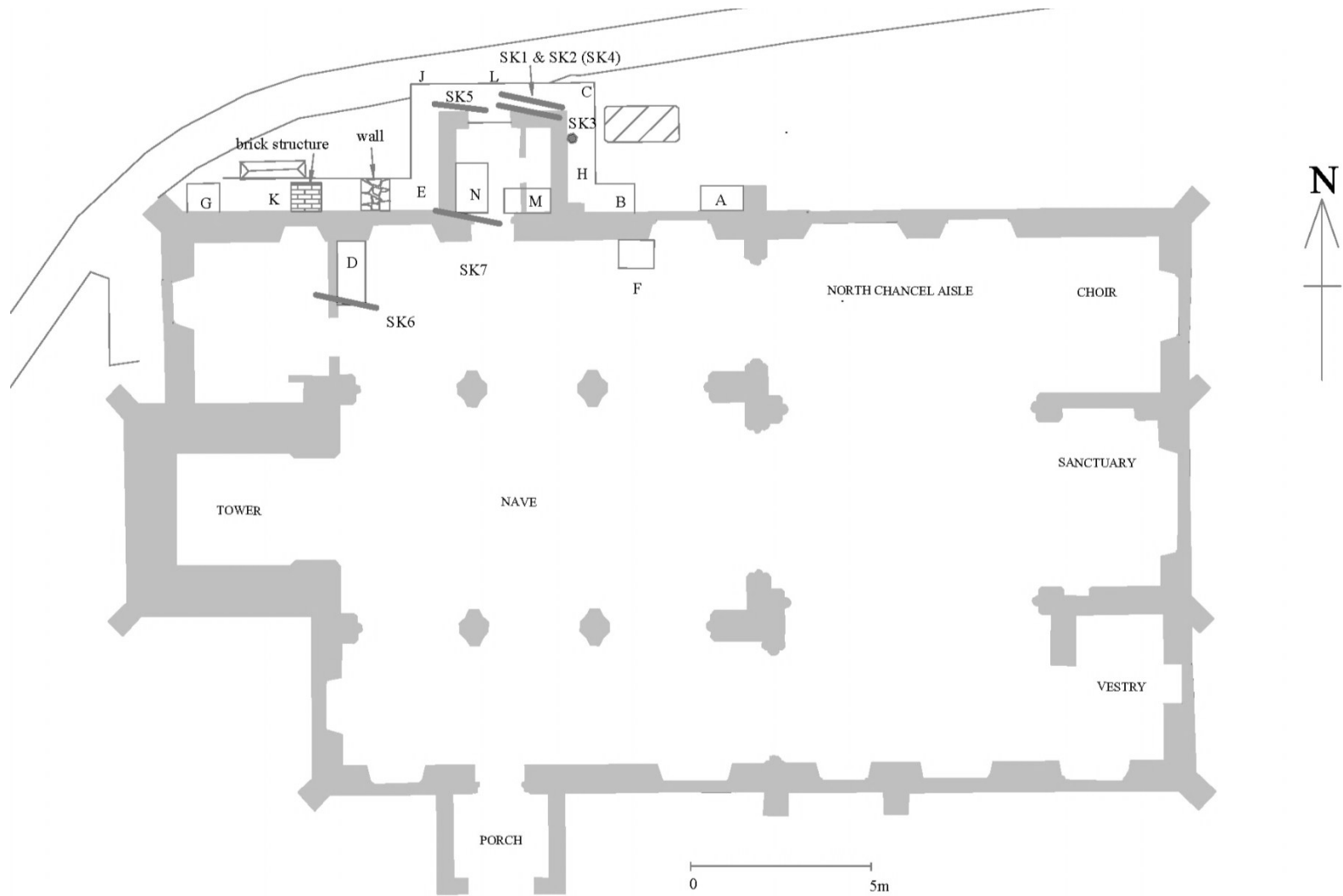


Figure 2: Plan of church showing location of trenches and archaeological features (NTS)

5. Methodology

The work followed the Written Scheme of Investigation (Buckley 2012) and adhered to the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (rev. 2010) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (rev. 2008).

The programme of work consisted of the underpinning of the foundations of the church on the north side by excavating small trenches beneath the foundations and filling them with concrete before moving on to another section. The excavated sections eventually joined up to underpin the north side of the church, however, each trench was excavated at a different time and was designated a letter during the course of the work (Fig. 2). Thirteen trenches were excavated in total (A; B; C; D; E; F; G; H; J; K; L; M; and N).

6. Results

Trenches A and B were approximately 1.2m in depth. They showed that the ironstone footings for the Church wall carried on down at least to this depth; the footing stepped out at c. 0.5m below ground level. They also showed that modern ground level is about the same level as when the wall was constructed. No construction cut for the wall could be seen so it is likely that the construction trench was wider than the trench for underpinning, although a ceramic drain running along the north edge of the trenches would have caused some disturbance. No human bones were observed.

Trench C, on the exterior north wall of the porch, showed that the footings for the porch were insubstantial in comparison with the main wall. Part of an articulated skeleton (SK1) was uncovered at a depth of 1.10m, lying E-W, which was lifted. No grave cut could be discerned. Below this was undisturbed yellow clay natural. Given that the skeleton was very close to the porch wall and lay partially across the entrance to it, it is likely that the burial pre-dates the construction of the porch. This trench was later extended under the present porch wall and a second skeleton (SK2) was revealed at 1.10m below ground level.

Trench D, in the interior of the Church, showed that the original floor had been taken up, in that area at least. A Victorian brick culvert capped with gravestones was revealed; this is of uncertain function but it appears to originally have run through the thickness of the north Church wall, possibly this is part of a hot-air heating system which was fed by an external furnace since removed. Below this culvert was a further dwarf wall constructed of Victorian brick, of unknown function. There was more than a metre of makeup consisting of brick fragments, sand, stone, and masonry fragments, all cemented together. There was a void at the bottom on the east side and a 19th century brick chamber was visible, which was mostly backfilled. The trench was extended to undercut the wall between the north aisle and the current kitchen. An east-west orientated skeleton was observed (SK6), located beneath the wall. The bones seen were the left tibia and fibula. The burial had clearly been coffined, as a line of decayed wood was seen below the bones at approximately 0.67m below the current aisle floor. The position of the leg bones indicated that the head and upper body would be below the present kitchen, while the legs were below the aisle floor. The bones were not removed during the work. Natural subsoil, consisting of blue/grey clay with orange sandy mottle was observed below the base of the coffin.

Trench E was located on the exterior junction of the west side porch with the northern aisle wall. This trench flooded inhibiting observation.

Trench F was located on the interior of the church to the east of the north porch. The trench was excavated through a bitumen floor, below which there was grey clay down the side of the north aisle wall footing. The trench flooded at c 1.10m. Neither archaeological features nor a wall construction cut were visible.

Trench G was located close to the buttress at the west end of the aisle wall, adjacent to a modern drain. The stepped foundation of the aisle wall could clearly be seen. However, the trench flooded at the base.

Trench H was excavated on the exterior of the west side of the porch. A skull was observed in the side of the trench located at 1.20m below ground level, directly underneath the porch foundations and therefore clearly pre-dating it. No associated bones were identified, suggesting that it was disarticulated or at least disturbed. The strata to the north of the skull appeared to be undisturbed natural subsoil. The trench undermined the porch on the eastern side, exposing the shallow depth of the porch foundations, especially when compared with the deeper foundations on the north side of the church aisle (extending to 1.35m below ground level). The top 0.5m of the strata consisted of loose silty clay with frequent ironstone rubble, small pebbles and root disturbance. Below this was mid grey brown clay, with occasional charcoal flecks, moderate ironstone fragments, which was interpreted as the disturbed burial soil of the of the churchyard. The natural subsoil was clean yellowish-blue clay, with occasional sandy inclusions and was encountered at 1.2m below ground level. A north-south aligned brick wall was present 1m east of the porch, visible in the trench from c.0.5m to a minimum of 1.5m below ground level. This was below the table tomb and is almost certainly the below-ground portion of the tomb.

Trench J was excavated on the west side of the porch, and eventually joined up with Trench E. The trench was 1.6m deep and 0.8m wide. The soils observed were similar to those seen in Trench H, with natural soil at the base of the trench. No features or skeletons were observed, however there was considerable root disturbance down to the base of the trench. The final depth was 1.9m and the base of the trench flooded.

Trench K was located between Trench G and Trench O. A fragment of masonry was identified. This consisted of a linear wall foundation, measuring 0.95m in length by 0.8m wide. It was constructed predominantly from ironstone blocks measuring approximately 0.4 x 0.25 x 0.15m in dimension. The stones were roughly faced on the outside but not wholly regular in shape. The footing was roughly faced on the outside with smaller, more irregular stones on the inside and small flat stones filling the gaps. No mortar was observed and the wall was therefore either dry-stone or clay-bonded, with the latter seeming to be the most likely explanation. Only a short stretch of wall was present and no return was observed, therefore a possible interpretation was that the masonry represented an early buttress (Figs 3-4).



Figure 3: The possible buttress seen from above



Figure 4: The possible buttress seen in elevation

West of this feature, there was a rubble-filled brick shaft approximately 0.5m wide. This was filled with loose sandy material with frequent brick and tile rubble. Excavation eventually revealed a brick arch and a former aperture to the interior of the church which had been filled with concrete (Figs 5-6). This was thought to represent a vent from the probable hot-air heating system seen in trench D and could even be the site of the exterior furnace.



Figure 5: The brick shaft prior to removal



Figure 6: A possible vent for the heating system, as seen from the exterior following removal of the brick shaft

The floor of the porch was lifted in order to excavate Trenches L, M and N. Gravestones were found to have been reused to build up the floor. The floor had been laid on broken gravestones. All those examined dated to the 18th century (dates of 1720, 1776 and 1777 were noted) and some were decorated with images of cherubs. They were laid with the decorated side down, on top of a soil rich in rubble.

Trench L was located on the north side of the north porch, directly beneath the threshold and joined up with Trench C on the east and Trench J on the west. The remains of three individuals were identified, all orientated east-west. Two of these were almost certainly the rest of Skeleton 1 and 2, previously identified. The third individual (SK5) was located to the west of the other two and mostly comprised bones from the lower body, including femora, pelvis, lumbar vertebrae and ribs. The individual was clearly juvenile, due to the small size and unfused state of the bones. The skeleton was 0.8m deep and partially beneath the porch wall and therefore clearly pre-dated its construction.

Trench M was excavated on the inside of the north porch against the east and south walls. The trench measured 0.7m (north-south) and 1.3m (east-west). Natural subsoil was present at approximately 0.7m deep below mid grey brown silty clay with frequent chalky stones, cobbles, ironstone fragments and flecks of brick and tile. The trench revealed the foundation of the aisle wall, showing that the foundation was 0.85m deep below threshold level and stepped out twice, extending 0.5m north of the aisle wall. The wall of the aisle itself showed signs that of alteration and rebuilding in the Victorian period (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: The exterior of the north aisle wall, as seen from inside the north porch (trench M below)

Trench N was located on the inside of the porch, butting up against the west wall of the porch and north wall of the aisle and measured 1.4m (north-south) and 0.9m (east-west). The foundation of the aisle revealed was different to that seen in Trench M, having only one step out from the wall. The foundation consisted of three courses of ironstone and was 0.3m wide and 0.65m deep. The soils consisted of mixed grey brown silty sandy clay with frequent roots and inclusions. Natural subsoil was encountered at 0.9m below threshold level. The trench was 1.4m deep. The legs of an east-west aligned skeleton were identified (SK7), which were apparently underlying the wall of the aisle (0.4m 'in' from the north edge of the foundation). If this individual was buried below the interior of the church, then they would have been squashed against and partly under the aisle wall. It therefore seems possible that the aisle wall has been rebuilt at some point after the burial. Perhaps significantly, the present wall appears to be built mostly of limestone rather than ironstone, when compared with the rest of the aisle wall.

7. Conclusions

The work has produced evidence concerning the history of the church. The locations of various burials encountered during this work have provided confirmation of the building sequence of the church. The area where the north porch currently stands was clearly formerly used for burials. Although the gravestones that were used to build up the porch floor could have been associated with the below ground burials in this location, it seems more likely the skeletons dated to an earlier period. No artefacts such as coffin nails were found and if the 18th century families could afford to erect a memorial to their relative, it seems likely that they might also have been able to supply a coffin. Re-used gravestones were also noted below the floor of the north aisle, suggesting that the utilisation of available local materials was commonplace during restoration work of this type.

The position of two of the burials in particular suggests that there may have been significant changes to the aisle itself. One skeleton, SK7, was seen just beneath the northern wall of the aisle adjacent to the door into the church. It seems surprising that it could have been buried here with the wall in its current position and could therefore suggest that some rebuilding has taken place. Apparent changes to the fabric of the aisle wall are also indicative of alterations. Another burial, SK 6, was located beneath the wall which currently separates the north aisle from the kitchen, suggesting that it may pre-date the wall.

In addition to the burials, the watching brief also encountered evidence for earlier structures both inside and outside the church. Stone foundations were present at right angles to the exterior of the north aisle wall. The stonework was keyed in, suggesting that it was contemporary with the foundations of the north aisle but the lack of evidence for any superstructure suggested that it had long since fallen out of use. It may represent a former buttress. A series of brick walls seen under the north aisle are likely to represent a Victorian hot air heating system. A vent was encountered to the exterior.

8. Archive

The site archive will be held by LCC HNET, with the accession no. X. A63 2012

The archive contains: site notes; plans, masonry and skeleton sheets, digital photo and black and white

The report is listed on the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. Available at: <http://oasis.ac.uk/>

9. Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the local archaeological journal *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* and *Rutland Record* in due course. The report has been added to the Archaeology Data Service's (ADS) Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) database held by the University of York.

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