

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
At St Nicholas Church,
Stanford on Avon, Northamptonshire
NGR: SP 588 788**

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February 2004

Client: St Nicholas Church Parochial Church Council

Checked by Project Manager

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An Archaeological Watching Brief
At St Nicholas Church, Stanford on Avon,
Northamptonshire.
NGR: SP 588 788

Summary

A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Stanford on Avon PCC by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on 20th of February 2004 during the excavation of a trench for an electrical cable across the grounds of St Nicholas Church (NGR SP 588 788). The site lies within the historic core of Stanford on Avon, Northamptonshire and was seen to have potential for surviving archaeological deposits. A trench measuring 0.5m wide and up to 0.9m deep was excavated into a mid grey-brown silty clay topsoil. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded.

The site archive will be deposited with Northamptonshire Heritage under site code SOA.2004.

1. Introduction

Stanford on Avon lies on the southern bank of the River Avon 8km north-east of Rugby (Fig. 1). The Leicestershire/Northamptonshire border, which follows the river, divides the village from the neighbouring Stanford Hall Estate. St Nicholas Church (NGR: SP 588 788) is situated at the heart of the shrunken medieval village with a number of earthworks surrounding the churchyard. Very few houses remain in the village although a recent housing development now occupies the site of the original Stanford Hall. The current church building dates mostly from between c.1300 to 1350 (Pevsner 1961) although this replaced a much earlier Norman building (St Nicholas Church guidebook). As part of an ongoing restoration programme an electricity supply is being installed in the church.

In view of the potential for uncovering archaeological deposits it was necessary that there should be archaeological attendance and recording during the work to ensure that any affected deposits were adequately recorded.

The work entailed excavating a trench from the west end of the tower outwards, in a northwesterly direction towards the north-west boundary wall. The trench continued along the line of the boundary wall but this did not form part of the watching brief. The watching brief took place on 20 February 2004.

2. Background

The proposed works, organised by St. Nicholas Parochial Church Council, are, as mentioned, part of a long-term programme of restoration work which started in 1985. There are no records of the locations of any earlier structures within the proposed trench area although it is known that an Anglo-Saxon and Norman church occupied the site prior to rebuilding in the 14th century.

Faint earthworks from the shrunken medieval village can be observed in the field immediately south of the church. A more extensive system of earthworks relating to the shrunken medieval village of Stanford also exists north-east of the site (Fig.2)

3. Archaeological Objectives

To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.

To establish the character, extent, date range and significance of any archaeological deposits affected by the proposed ground works.

To excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works.

To produce an archive and report of any results.

4. Methodology

The work consisted of excavating a narrow trench 0.5m wide and between 0.8 and 0.9m deep. The trench left the west end of the tower through a doorway that appeared to have been bricked-up relatively recently, possibly during one of the late 19th or early 20th century restoration phases. The trench then headed straight towards the north-east boundary wall approximately 11m away. All excavation work on this section of trench was observed and the spoil scanned for finds.

A layer of turf was removed by hand with the remaining spoil being removed using a ditching bucket on the front actor of a small mechanical excavator. All deposits were recorded by notes, photographs and sketches. The archaeological work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

5. Results

Removal of the turf revealed a mid grey-brown silty-clay topsoil with many large stones. The same fill continued down to the base of the trench. Foundation stones for the tower could be seen extending westwards by 1.1m and reaching down beyond the base of the trench. Elsewhere along the trench no other features or archaeological deposits were observed. A disused modern ceramic land-drain was encountered cutting across the trench approximately half way along the trench.

A single piece of clay pipe stem was noted in the spoil along with two pieces of modern glazed pottery. None of these were retained. A number of fragments of human bone were also noted, as would be expected in a churchyard, again these were not retained, and were reburied within the trench.

Although not part of the watching brief, the trench running along the north-eastern edge of the churchyard had been excavated on the previous day. A brief inspection revealed that there were no archaeological deposits surviving in the areas that were not badly disturbed by roots.

6. Discussion

No archaeological deposits, features or pre-modern artefacts were encountered during the watching brief.

7. Archive

The archive consists of site notes and photographs to be held by National Monuments records and the Diocese of Leicester, Accession under accession number SOA.2004

8. Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in *Northamptonshire Archaeology*.

9. References

Pevsner N. 1961. *The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

The Parish Church of Saint Nicholas, Stanford on Avon. Leaflet from St Nicholas Church.

10. Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was undertaken by A R Hyam. The project was managed by R Buckley.

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25th February 2004
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Appendix.

Site visits

Date	Duration
20.2.04	Half day

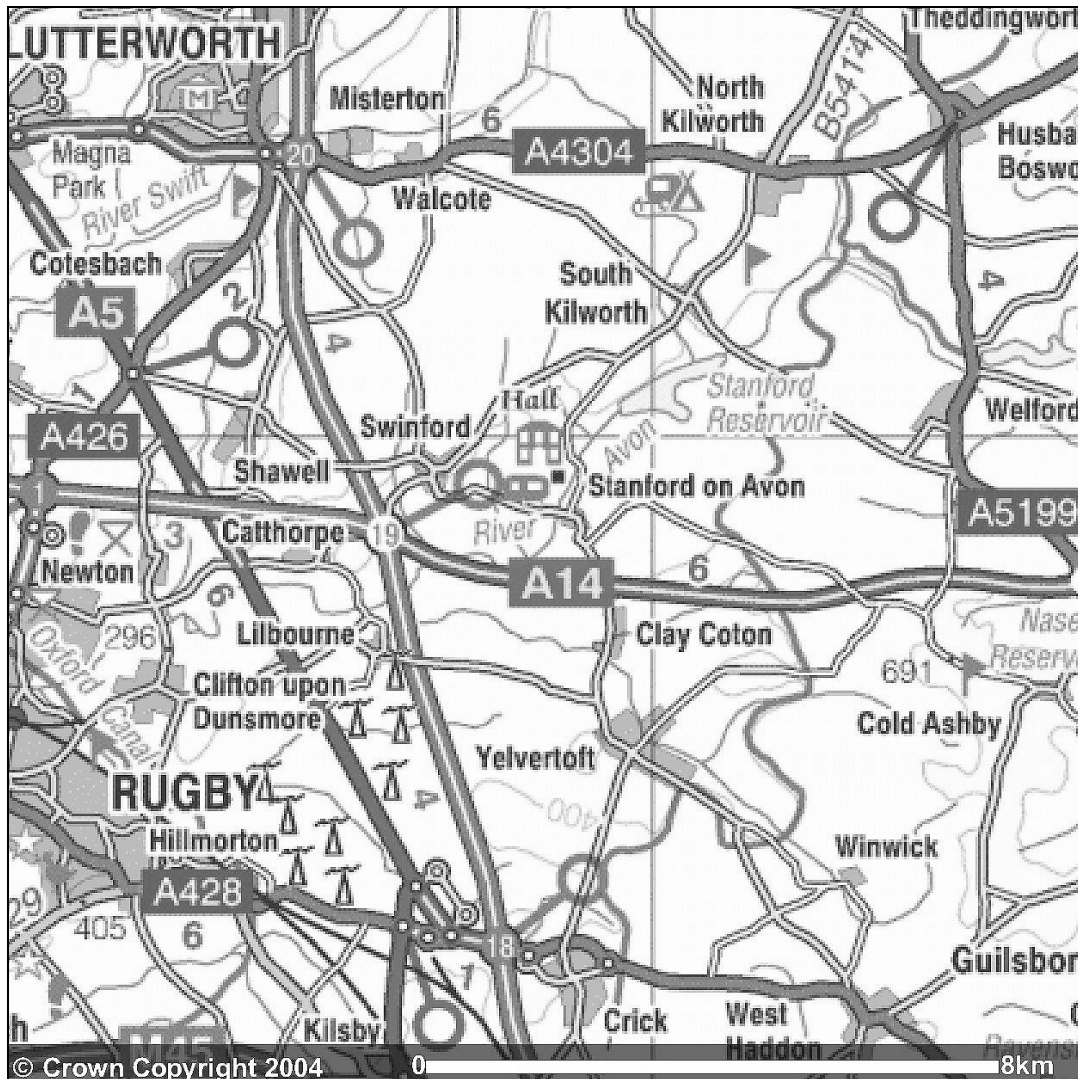


Figure 1. Stanford on Avon location map.

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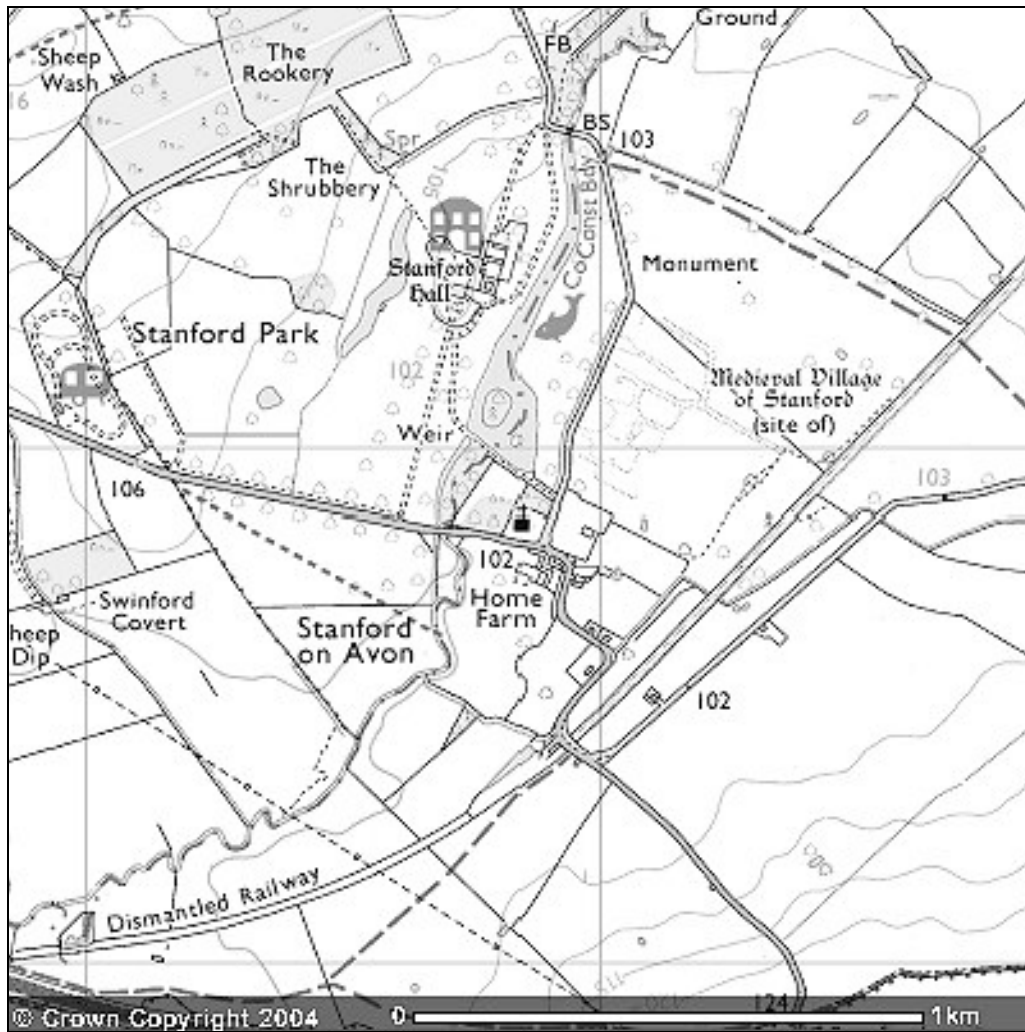


Figure 2. Location of St Nicholas Church

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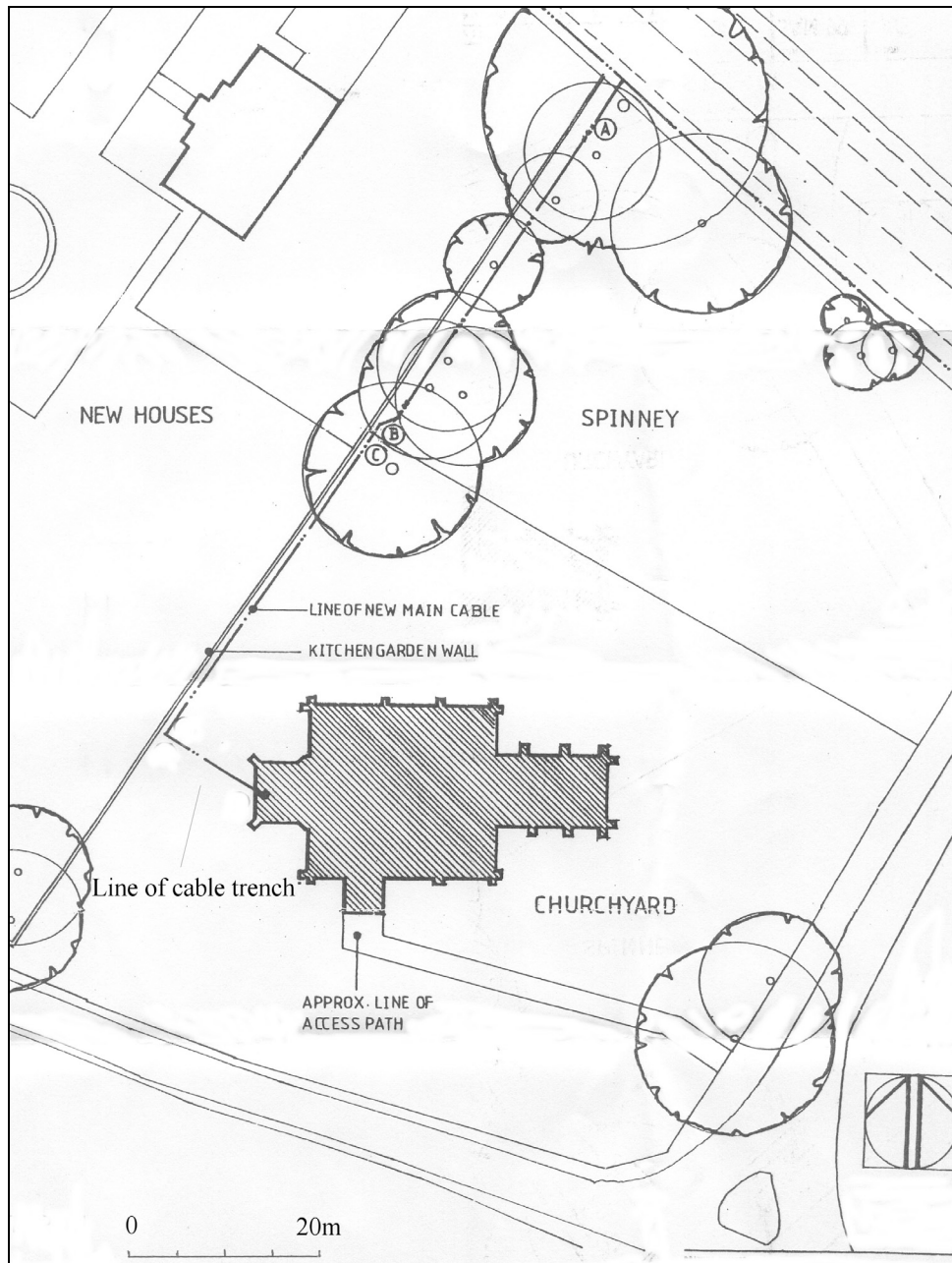


Figure 3. St Nicholas Church with line of trench.