

SLBS12



ST LEONARD'S CHURCH, BRIDGNORTH, SHROPSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief

for The Churches Conservation Trust

11/05330/LBC

December 2012

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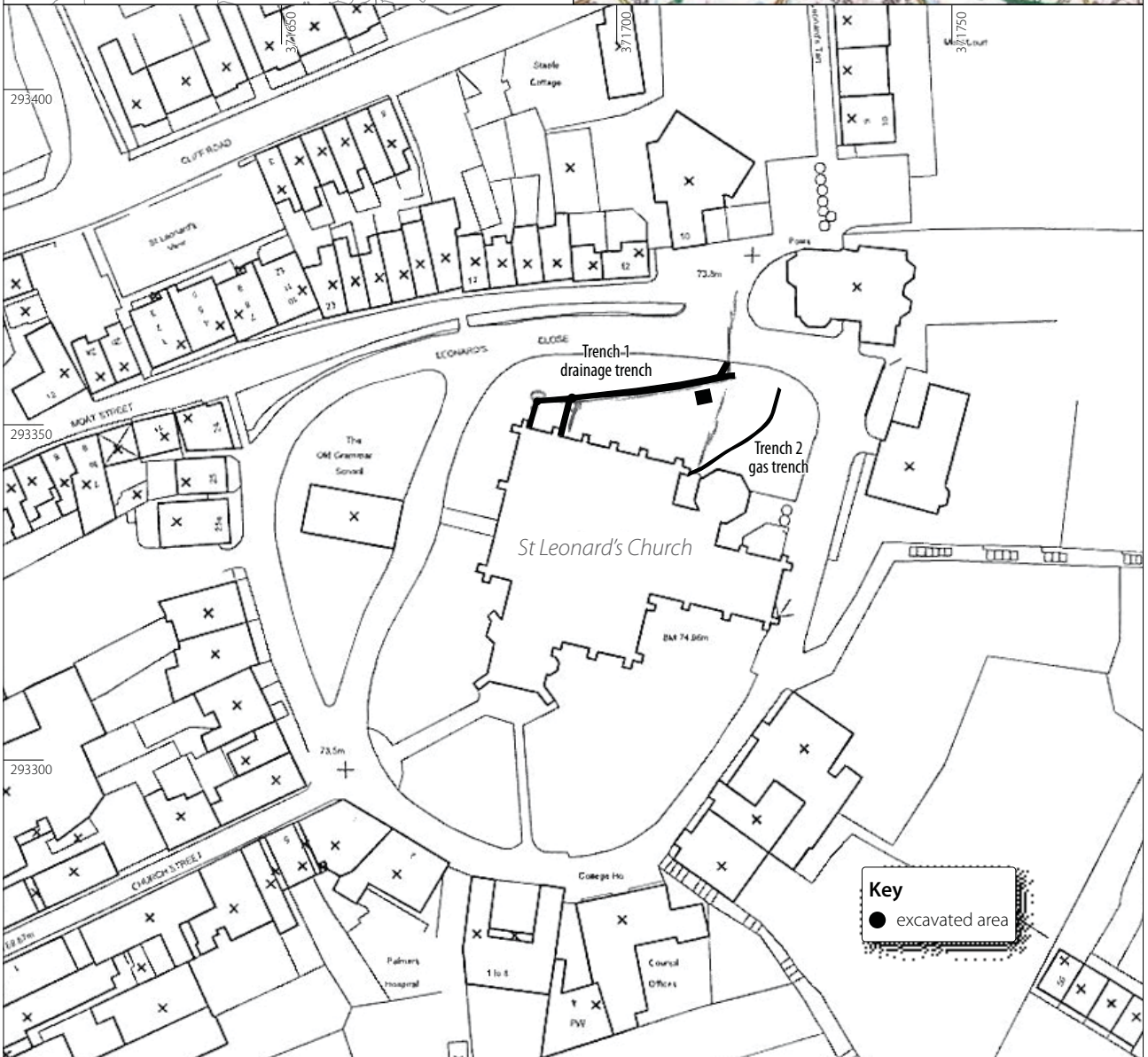
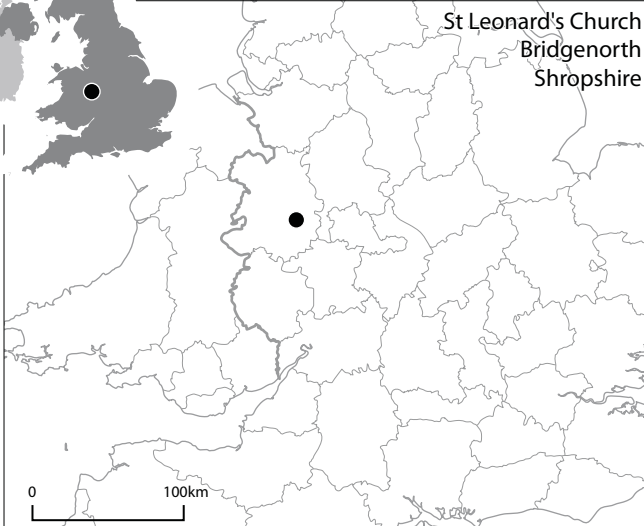
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Scale 1:1,000 @ A4



Illus 1

Site location

ST LEONARD'S CHURCH, BRIDGNORTH, SHROPSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief

Headland Archaeology undertook a watching brief within the northern churchyard of St Leonard's, Bridgnorth, due to the installation of a foul water drainage system and gas pipe. Building rubble likely related to reconstruction of the church following damage in the English Civil War and human remains from the burial ground were encountered.

1. INTRODUCTION

Headland Archaeology Ltd. (UK) was commissioned by The Churches Conservation Trust to undertake the monitoring of ground works relating to the installation of lavatory and kitchen facilities at St Leonard's Church, Bridgnorth, a Grade II* listed building.

Listed building consent (11/05330/LBC) was granted for works by Shropshire Council. A Written Scheme of Investigations was produced by Headland Archaeology Ltd (Kimber 2012) and approved by the local planning authority. The watching brief took place in July and August 2012.

1.1 Location

Bridgnorth is located in the Severn Valley, in south-east Shropshire; it is less than 30 miles from Birmingham and some 20 miles from Shrewsbury. The underlying geological deposits in this area compromise the Bridgnorth Sandstone Formation.

The church is located in the town centre and ground works were situated on the north side of the church (NGR SO 71659 93338) which is 74.37m (OD).

1.2 Archaeological background

The origins of the present church lie in the 12th century. During the English Civil War, in 1646 a battle took place between the Royalist and Parliamentary troops in the churchyard. Subsequently the Parliamentarians used the north aisle of the church to store ammunition; subsequently the church was hit by cannon fire causing an explosion which resulted in the fall of the church roof and the complete destruction of the north aisle (English Heritage – National Heritage List 1178124). Small restoration works occurred in the 17th century but much of the

existing structure dates to major restoration episodes in the 19th century by W. Slater & R.H. The churchyard was closed for burial in 1855. The church has been redundant since 1976 and has been in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust since 1980.

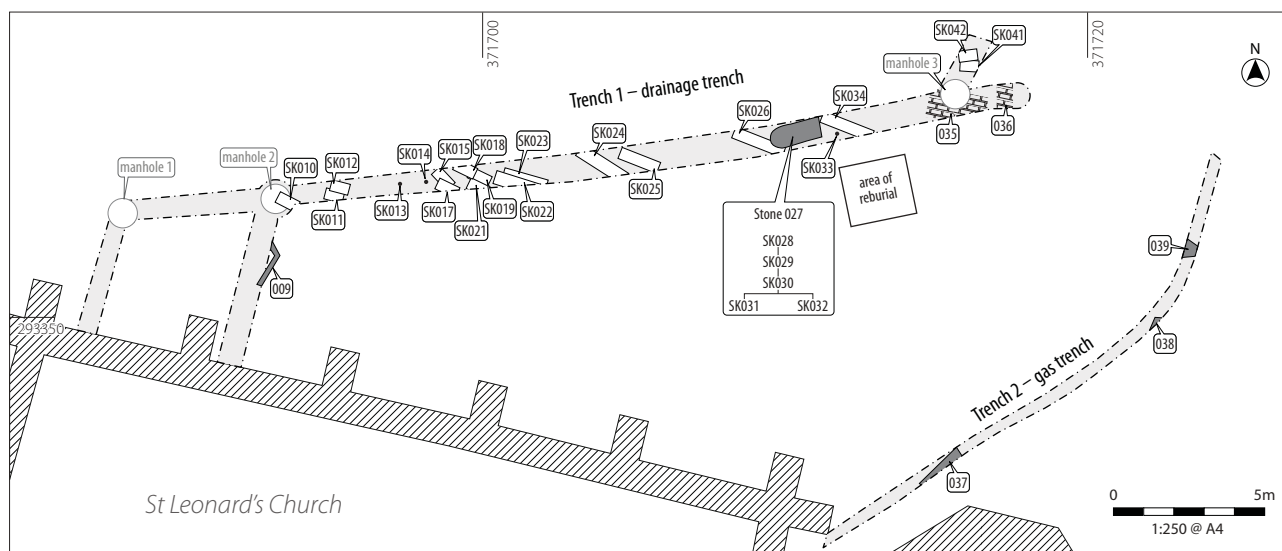
2. METHOD

The objective of the archaeological watching brief was to record and remove any archaeological deposits impacted upon by the proposed works with minimal disruption to the project programme. It was highly likely that human remains would be encountered and the aim was to ensure such remains would be treated in accordance with professional, ethical and legal requirements.

Construction work within the church consisted of a new pew plinth involving the rebuilding of the sleeper walls in the northern aisle; two upper courses of bricks were removed and rebuilt.

In the graveyard a trench system for foul water drainage, which included three manholes, extended from the western end of the north wall of the church in a north and north-eastern direction. A further trench for the installation of a gas pipe ran from the eastern end of the north wall also in a roughly north-east direction.

Trenches were machine excavated to their required depth, unless articulated burials were encountered, whereupon the remains were excavated and removed by hand. The trenches for the foul water drainage were excavated to a depth of 1.5m, with the exception of manhole 3 at 1.8m. The gas pipe trench was much shallower at 0.65m. Burials below these depths and parts of individual skeletons which extended beyond the trench edges were left *in situ*.



Illus 2

Site plan showing the position of articulated skeletons & brick tombs

All recording followed IfA Standards and Guidance. Recording was undertaken on Headland Archaeology *pro forma* trench record sheets. 35mm colour transparencies and B&W print photographs were taken, and a drawn section of each trench was recorded at a scale of 1:10.

within contexts [006], [007] or [008]. Only two grave cuts were observed, for SK015 and SK017, and seven individuals had evidence of coffin remains. Five skeletons were cut by subsequent burial and two skeletons lay directly beneath later burials. This includes a sequence showing five burial phases (SK026-028-029-030-031/032), with the uppermost individual buried within a coffin.

2

All articulated skeletons and grave assemblages were excavated and recorded in accordance with the Headland Archaeology recording manual and in cognisance of guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England (CoE and English Heritage 2005) and IfA Technical paper No. 13 (McKinley and Roberts 1993). The works were authorised by faculty and the excavated remains were stored temporarily within the church before being reburied in the graveyard.

3. RESULTS

The removal and reconstruction of the upper section of the sleeper walls was completed without disturbance to the surrounding church architecture or to the under-floor area and no archaeologically significant features were uncovered.

A substantial amount of brick and mortar rubble was uncovered within the stratigraphic sequence at the west end of trench 1, tapering-off after manhole 2. The position of such rubble by the north wall of the church is consistent with the post-civil war reconstruction of the church in the 17th and 19th centuries.

Articulated skeletons were encountered within the foul water drainage trenches, however due to the shallow depth of the gas pipe trench no skeletons were disturbed (see illustration 2). A small amount of disarticulated skeletal material was dispersed throughout the excavated area.

In total 22 articulated skeletons were recorded and excavated. Burials were encountered at a depth of 1.19m from the surface



Illus 3

NNW-facing section at manhole 2 in Trench 1

Illus 4

SK025 with breastplate remains

Illus 5

Bone hair comb on cranium of SK034

In all cases wood from coffins only survived as a dark stain, or not at all. Although very badly corroded, iron coffin nails and handles with grip plates were present in some burials, the latter in five burials indicating a post-medieval date. Skeletons 015, 019, 025, 034 all exhibited *depositem* plates (or breastplates) however also in a bad state of preservation (see illustration 3). The plates were of iron painted black; SK034 and SK025 exhibited white lettering, the latter was illegible and the former only had four letters which could be read 'EECH'. SK018 had a plate located over the tibiae region displaying a cherub with wings. SK015 had either the top of a shield motif preserved or a crown motif.

Three brick-lined graves were recorded in Trench 1 and a further one in Trench 2. Two of these were represented only by a small corner of the tomb but [035] and [036] in Trench 1 were rectangular and the latter had a barrel-vaulted roof. In vault [035], a horizontal layer of slate tiles was placed directly above coffin [040] producing a firm surface for subsequent burial of family members.

Three partial gravestones were uncovered including [020] & [027] in Trench 1 and [039] in Trench 2, all of which lay horizontally just beneath the turf and not in their original contexts. Gravestone [027] was the only one with legible text:

*'...e lye the bodies o...
...D and Margare...
...ed July the 20...
...ed April the...'*

Burials were supine in an extended position and aligned roughly east-west, with the head situated at the west of the grave, in the typical Christian manner, with the exception of SK 031, which lay with its head at the east. One explanation for this differing orientation is thought to be that such individuals represented priests, who and when resurrected would rise up to face their flocks; a theory which may represent more of a post-medieval than medieval custom (after 1600, Daniell 1997, 149). Individuals with arms observable had them placed straight by their sides or arms were placed across the lower spine/pelvic area.

Finds included 17th–18th century pottery found within the grave-cut of SK018. One female individual (SK034) had a small



3

bone hair comb adhering to the right side of her cranium (Illus 5). Such combs were worn as ornaments and used to secure chignons and are known to have been used from the early 18th century until the mid-19th century when tortoiseshell and metal combs were favoured (Bevan 2006, 181). A clay pipe was found within the base of brick-lined tomb [035]. These are known to have been manufactured in Bridgnorth in the early 19th century.

3.1 Osteological comment

Tegan Daly

Although not standard for a project of this nature, it proved possible for the remains excavated on site to be briefly examined by a qualified osteologist in order to produce a basic summary of their character.

As was to be expected, the majority of burials were <25% complete (14/21) due to the narrow width of the trenches. Only six



Illus 6

Spondylolysis of the 4th lumbar vertebrae in SK010

Illus 7

Muscle trauma on the right femur of SK026



while keeping the legs straightened, and dragging and carrying heavy loads and there are also cases attributed to acute trauma.

Skeleton 026 exhibited muscle trauma at three different sites; the distal region of the abductor magnus attachment, the distal section of the vastus lateralis attachment (see *Illus 7*) and at the tibial collateral ligament insert. The exuberant ossification in muscle tissue at the site of attachment is more likely to occur in response to trauma in younger individuals.

Other pathologies observed included degenerative changes, non-specific infection, symptoms of childhood stress, dental disease and a possible case of rickets.

The sample of burials examined is not representative of the buried population due to the small number excavated in proportion to the size of the burial ground. Records of all skeletons will be deposited with the project archive.

4. DISCUSSION

Work at St Leonard's has provided evidence of building rubble consistent the reconstruction of the medieval church following the English Civil War. Furthermore, twenty-two articulated burials provided information on the health of the inhabitants of the Parish of St Leonard's.

The burials uncovered at St Leonard's potentially date from the 12th to the 19th century. Limited stratigraphic evidence places coffined burials later in the sequence compared to un-coffined burials – the latter may be of either an earlier post-medieval or medieval date.

Depositum plates came in a variety of styles in the post-medieval period displaying the name of the deceased, date of death, followed by their age at death. The shape of the *depositum* should by heraldic convention indicate the sex and marital status of the person buried: a shield for a boy or young man, a lozenge for a girl or unmarried woman, a rectangle with an oval panel for a married woman and rectangular with a square panel for a man; although in the 19th century such conventions appeared to have waned. The winged cherub motif seen on SK018's *depositum* plate is found in most post-medieval graveyards and is associated with

burials were over 50% complete including three near complete individuals of >75%. Surface preservation (McKinley 2004, grades 0 to 5+) was generally good with 81.8% of burials exhibiting grades 0-2, and fragmentation mostly low (54.6%) or moderate (31.8%). The surrounding sandy soils seem to have preserved the skeletons extremely well, although the corroded metal coffin lid plates (*depositum* plates) did cause softening and disintegration of the bones of the spine and ribs in a few individuals.

Of the 22 *in situ* skeletons five were non-adult and seventeen adults. Of the five non-adult individuals, one was a younger child (1–6 years); two were older children (7–12 years) and two adolescents (13–17 years).

SK 010 exhibited spondylolysis of its fourth lumbar vertebra (see illustration 6). This condition is believed to be the result of a combination of evolutionary, genetic and activity-related factors. Clinical studies have shown that fatigue or stress fracturing can occur due to repetitive movements such as bending at the waist

all social classes, it dates from c1740–1850. The motif on the plate of SK015 dates to the early 19th century (Hancox 2006).

The brick-lined vaults are also post-medieval constructs of an early 19th century date (Buteux and Cherrington, 2006: 70). Such burial structures may also representative the burial of individuals of slightly higher socio-economic status in comparison to contemporaneous individuals buried in earth-cut graves (Brickley *et al* 2006).

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6. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Site registers

Appendix 1.1 Trench register

Trench	Length (m)	Width (m)	Max. depth (m)	Level (top)
1	40.0	0.80	1.8	74.37 (mOD)
2	19.5	0.35	0.65	74.30 (mOD)

Appendix 1.2 Context register

Trench	Context	Description
1 & 2	001	Topsoil – turf & dark brown sandy silt
1 – W end only	002	Mortar/brick deposit
1 – W end only	003	Mid-grey brown silty sand
1 – W end only	004	Dark brown clay
1 – W end only	005	Light brown pink silty sand, Mortar/brick
1 & 2	006	Dark grey sand
1	007	Bright red silty sand
1	008	Light pink-brown sand
1	009	Masonry structure
1	010	Adult skeleton
1	011	Adult skeleton
1	012	Skeleton – sub-adult
1	013	Skeleton – sub-adult
1	014	Adult disarticulated skull
1	015	Adult skeleton – with coffin fittings
1	016	Cut of grave for SK 015
1	017	Adult skeleton
1	018	Adult skeleton
1	019	Skeleton – sub-adult
1	020	Gravestone fragment
1	021	Adult skeleton
1	022	Adult skeleton
1	023	Adult skeleton
1	024	Adult skeleton
1	025	Adult skeleton
1	026	Adult skeleton
1	027	Gravestone

Trench	Context	Description
1	028	Adult skeleton
1	029	Skeleton – sub-adult
1	030	Adult skeleton
1	031	Adult skeleton – head at east
1	032	Adult skeleton
1	033	Adult disarticulated skull with pathology
1	034	Adult skeleton
1	035	Brick-lined grave
1	036	Brick-lined grave with vaulted roof
2	037	Lightening conductor
2	038	Brick-lined grave – north corner revealed, left in-situ
2	039	Gravestone
1	040	Coffin in brick-lined grave [035]
1	041	Adult skeleton
1	042	Adult skeleton



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