

**ST MARY'S CHURCH,  
PURTON,  
WILTSHIRE.**

**NGR: 409679.187175**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

December 2020  
Report No. 1397



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY, MANAGEMENT & FIELD SERVICES**

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**Quality Assurance**

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## **SUMMARY**

Between 23<sup>rd</sup> September and 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020 Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Purton, Wiltshire (NGR: 409679.187175). The project was commissioned by Paul Dempsey on behalf of St Mary's Church.

The archaeological works comprised the monitoring of the excavation of service trenches, both outside of and within the church building, as well as the removal of part of the church wall, in advance of the construction of a new doorway.

The excavation of a service trench to the north exterior of the church building revealed part of a rock-cut terrace, which extended approximately 5m north of the building, up to a depth of approximately 1.5m. Further observations indicated that the exterior part of the church wall in this area was situated on top of the natural substrates present within the terrace. It was possible, based upon the observed stratigraphic evidence, to suggest that the excavation of the terrace was most likely to have been associated with the construction of the church walls, which in this part of the church is thought to have occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Observation of the wall removal for the new doorway indicated that the wall represented a single phase of construction, with no evidence of modification or repair. No artefactual dating evidence was present within the wall matrix.

Two interior service trenches were very shallow and of negligible interpretative value.

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

### CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

### Medieval

The period between AD 1066 and AD 1500.

### Natural

In archaeological terms, this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

### NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

### OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

### OS

Ordnance Survey.

### Post-medieval

The period between AD 1500 and AD 1900.

### Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43, traditionally sub divided into; *Palaeolithic* – c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – c. 4,500 BC to c. 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – c. 2,000 BC to c. 800 BC; *Iron Age* – c. 800 BC to AD 43.

### Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

### Saxon

The period between AD 410 and AD 1066.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Foundations Archaeology between 23<sup>rd</sup> September and 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at St Mary's Church, Purton, Wiltshire (NGR: 409679.187175). The project was commissioned by Paul Dempsey on behalf of St Mary's Church.
- 1.2 The watching brief was conducted in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2020), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA) *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 1.3 The code of conduct of the CifA was adhered to throughout.

## 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Refurbishment works at the Parish Church of St Mary, Purton required the excavation of service trenches, as well as the opening up of one of the internal walls of the church, in order to construct a new doorway. A Historic Building Wall Construction report was completed by the Historic Building Advisory Service in February 2019 on the north aisle west wall, which will be modified during these works. The report concluded that the wall was constructed in the 1870's during modifications to the church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. An archaeological watching brief was requested during the intrusive works.
- 2.2 The Parish Church of St Mary is a Grade I Listed Building (1283956) and Historic England were contacted on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2020, in order to confirm if Listed Building Consent was required for this works. On the 30<sup>th</sup> January Steve Miles of Historic England confirmed that, in this instance, Listed Building Consent was not required.
- 2.3 The Church of St Mary's is located within the Conservation Area of Purton. It is bounded to the east, south and west by The Fox, within an area of residential and agricultural activity. To the northwest is the village of Purton, some distance away from the church. The church has 13<sup>th</sup> century origins; however, it is probable that it stands on the grounds of an earlier church. Within the graveyard to the south of the church building, is a Medieval cross (Scheduled Monument 1019840) which is thought to be in its original position.
- 2.4 Purton is thought to have early origins and building debris and pottery of Romano-British date have been found at various locations within the village and a Roman lamp was found in the church graveyard in around 1890. The main focus of Roman settlement, however, appears to be on the western side of Purton. Within the Dogridge area, evidence of pottery production, in the form of at least four kilns of 2<sup>nd</sup> century date, has been discovered and high-status residences with mosaics have been discovered between Dogridge and

## St Mary's Church, Purton, Wiltshire: Archaeological Watching Brief

Pavenhill, in an area known as 'Black Lands'. To the east of Dogridge, approximately 1km to the west of the church, a late Roman walled cemetery was discovered in 1987 within the grounds of the former North View hospital. Recent excavations in this location by Foundations Archaeology, revealed evidence for high status Early Roman settlement in the form of a substantial and well-appointed post-built building, which appeared to have been demolished in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, prior to the construction of the late Roman cemetery.

- 2.5 The name Purton is thought to derive from the Old English for pear tree (*pirge*) and an enclosure or farmstead (*tun*). Purton was owned by Malmesbury Abbey from the 7<sup>th</sup> century until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. An inhumation cemetery from the early Anglo-Saxon period was revealed in around 1900 during quarrying at The Fox, approximately 670m to the east of the church. The location of the Saxon cemetery, some 2km east of the late Roman cemetery, along with Malmesbury Abbey's decision to establish its *demesne* premises nearby, could indicate a shift eastwards for the focus of settlement. The focus then shifted northwest, leaving the manor house and church isolated at Church End and the development of Purton was then mainly contained along the main road (High Street).
- 2.6 The underlying geology within the site comprises *Stanford Formation* – limestone with no superficial deposits (BGS – online viewer).
- 2.7 The site therefore contained the potential for archaeological features and deposits, predominately dating to the Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval periods. This did not prejudice the works against evidence relating to other periods.

### 3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological monitoring were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains; as well as to make recommendations for management of the resource, including further archaeological works if necessary.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
  - i) to record, prior to their destruction, archaeological deposits within the monitored areas, and date these where possible;
  - ii) to attempt to characterise the nature and preservation of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning and extent of features present within the monitored areas;

iii) to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence which will attempt to determine the complexity of the horizontal and vertical stratigraphy present, and to recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples;

iv) to define any research priorities that may be relevant should further field investigation be required.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 Intrusive groundworks were subject to archaeological monitoring, as shown in Figure 2. The groundworks comprised the manual excavation of service trenches, both outside of and within the church building, as well as the removal of part of the church wall, by use of a mechanical hammer-drill and a manual hammer and chisel.
- 4.2 All archaeological investigation, excavation and recording was undertaken in accordance with the WSI and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

## **5 RESULTS**

- 5.1 **Service Trench A** (Figure 3, Photograph 1) extended northwards from the north wall of the church for approximately 3m and was between 0.30m and 0.70m wide. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.40m below the Modern ground. The lowest encountered deposit consisted of natural beige solid limestone pea-grit (102), which was directly overlain by a dark brown soft clay silt topsoil (103), average thickness 0.25m. The topsoil contained occasional Modern artefacts. No archaeological features or finds were present within the majority of the trench. Limited Modern disturbance was present in the form a cable trench and a possible soakaway pit, which were both cut into the top of the natural substrates.
- 5.1.1 Where the service trench abutted the north church wall, it revealed part of the underlying stratigraphy and wall elevation. The base of the church wall (101)a was situated directly on top of the natural substrates (102) and was abutted by the Modern topsoil (103). The exposed wall elevation consisted of two courses of roughly shaped and faced rectangular limestone blocks (101)a, approximately 0.25m in depth, which were bonded by a beige limestone pea-grit mortar. In elevation, the individual blocks measured up to 0.44m long by 0.15m thick. These were overlain by a single course of relatively thin, shaped and faced limestone slabs (101)b, which, in elevation, were up to 0.28m long by 0.06m thick. They were bonded by a weathered grey cement mortar. Stones (101)b were present at the level of the Modern ground surface and were overlain by the above-ground part of the church wall (101)c, which consisted of multiple courses of roughly shaped and faced square and rectangular blocks. The individual blocks, which, in elevation, measured up to 0.38m long by 0.23m thick, were bonded by a weathered grey cement mortar.



- 5.2 **Service Trench B** (Figure 4, Photograph 5) was located within the church building, northwest of the Nave and northeast of the Narthex. It was approximately 2m long by 0.30m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.33m below the Modern ground level. The lowest encountered deposit consisted of beige limestone rubble (104), average 0.26m thick, which contained occasional Modern detritus, including pieces of plastic. This was sealed by a light grey screed cement (107), average 0.05m thick, which was in turn overlain by terracotta and black ceramic floor tiles (105), average 0.02m thick, which formed the Modern floor surface. No archaeological features or finds were present within the trench.
- 5.3 **Service Trench C** (Figure 4, Photograph 6) was located within the church building, southwest of the Nave and southeast of the Narthex. It was approximately 1.20m long by up to 1.10m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.33m below the Modern ground level. The lowest encountered deposit consisted of beige limestone rubble (104), average 0.28m thick, which contained occasional fragments of brick. This was sealed by a light grey screed cement (107), average 0.03m thick, which was in turn overlain by terracotta and black ceramic floor tiles (105), average 0.02m thick, which formed the Modern floor surface. Numerous wooden floor joists/beams were present within the trench. These were situated on top of limestone blocks and were located directly beneath the screed cement. The spaces between the joists/beams had been in-filled with rubble (104). The wooden joists/beams appeared to have been machine-cut and shaped and were most likely to be Modern. No archaeological features or finds were present within the trench.
- 5.4 **Service Trench D** (Figure 3, Photographs 2 and 3) was situated at the northwest of the church. It extended further to the northwest for approximately 10m and was 0.40m wide. The northwest part of the trench was cut through the western end of an east – west aligned linear earthwork slope [106]. The slope defined the northern edge of a terrace (112.43m AOD), which extended from the north of the church for approximately 5m, and the southern edge of the higher graveyard ground level to the north (approximately 114m AOD). The service trench was between 0.60m and up to 1.13m in depth, where it cut into the slope. The lowest encountered deposit within the trench consisted of natural beige solid limestone pea-grit (102), which was directly overlain by a dark brown soft clay silt topsoil (103), average thickness 0.18m. The trench section across the earthwork slope (Sec 002) indicated that the natural solid substrates had been cut away [106], to a depth of 0.90m, in order to create the terrace. No other archaeological features or finds were present within the trench. Modern disturbance was represented by metal lightning rods, which were situated in the topsoil, whilst a substantial probable soakaway pit was cut into the top of the natural limestone, in the middle part of the trench.
- 5.5 **Service Trench E** (Figure 3, Photograph 4) extended northwards from the north wall of the church for approximately 3.40m and was 0.40m wide. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.40m below the Modern ground. The lowest encountered deposit consisted of natural beige solid

limestone pea-grit (102), which was directly overlain by a dark brown soft clay silt topsoil (103), average thickness 0.30m. No archaeological features or finds were present within the majority of the trench.

5.5.1 Where the service trench abutted the north church wall, it revealed part of the underlying stratigraphy and wall elevation. The base of the church wall (101)d was situated directly on top of the natural substrates (102) and was abutted by the Modern topsoil (103). The exposed wall elevation consisted of a single course of shaped and faced rectangular limestone blocks (101)d, which were bonded by a beige limestone pea-grit mortar. In elevation, the individual blocks measured at least 0.33m long by 0.15m thick. These were overlain, at the approximate Modern ground level, by a single finely shaped and faced rectangular limestone block (101)e, which, in elevation, was 0.77m long by 0.33 thick. The central part of the block contained five stone-cut air vents, forming an 'I', flanked by two 'X's, with a small diamond-shaped hole located above each X. Block (101)e was abutted and overlain by the above ground church wall (101)c, which consisted of multiple courses of roughly shaped and faced square and rectangular blocks, equivalent to the above ground wall present in Service Trench A. The individual blocks measured, in elevation, up to 0.28m long by 0.11m thick. Both blocks (101)c and block (101)e were bonded by a weathered grey cement mortar.

5.6 **Wall Removal** (Figure 4, Photographs 7 to 16). The opening for the new doorway measured approximately 2.60m high by 1m wide and was situated within a north – south aligned church wall, located immediately to the north of the Narthex. It was located directly beneath a windowsill. The upper part of the wall was approximately 0.60m thick, whilst the lower part was slightly wider at approximately 0.70m thick. A finely dressed chamfered stone was present on the exterior wall face, at the point where the wall became thicker, at approximately 0.75m above the base of the excavation. The exterior and interior wall faces comprised multiple courses of cement bonded, shaped and faced limestone blocks, which were similar to the above ground blocks present in Service Trenches A and E. Loose limestone rubble was present within the interior core of the wall. The interior wall elevation was covered in a layer of white-painted limestone render, approximately 0.06m thick. The base of the excavation did not penetrate to the base of the wall, whilst the top of the excavation revealed the base of the overlying windowsill, which consisted of limestone slabs bonded by a probable cement mortar. No artefactual dating evidence was present within the wall matrix.

5.7 No human remains were present within any of the monitored excavations.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

6.1 The excavation of Service Trench D revealed significant archaeological evidence, which indicated that the terrace [106] to the north of the church building had been created by the excavation and removal of a fairly substantial amount of solid limestone substrate. On the basis of the stratigraphic evidence

in Service Trenches A and E, it was possible to demonstrate that the exterior part of the north church wall was situated directly on top of the flat natural substrates, which formed the base of the terrace. A relatively uniform and contiguous topsoil layer, which was situated directly on top of the exposed natural, extended across the terrace slope and base, and abutted the exterior of the church wall. The evidence from the watching brief observations at the north exterior of the church would, therefore, suggest that the excavation and landscaping of the terrace was most likely to be associated with the construction of the church walls in this area, which is thought to have occurred in the 1870's, during modifications to the church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is therefore likely that any earlier archaeological features or deposits, which may have been present immediately north of the church, would have been removed during these modifications.

- 6.2 The monitoring and photographic recording of the church wall removal indicated that it probably represented a single phase of construction, with no obvious evidence of modification or repair.
- 6.3 The interior service trenches did not penetrate below Modern levels and were of negligible interpretative value.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The excavation of a service trench to the north exterior of the church building revealed part of a rock-cut terrace, which extended approximately 5m north of the building, up to a depth of approximately 1.5m. Further observations indicated that the exterior part of the church wall in this area was situated on top of the natural substrates present within the terrace. It was possible, based upon the observed stratigraphic evidence, to suggest that the excavation of the terrace was most likely to have been associated with the construction of the church walls, which in this part of the church is thought to have occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Observation of the wall removal for the new doorway indicated that the wall represented a single phase of construction, with no evidence of modification or repair. No artefactual dating evidence was present within the wall matrix. Two interior service trenches were very shallow and of negligible interpretative value.
- 7.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology but will be deposited in due course with Wiltshire Museum under Accession Code DZSWS:07-2020. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

## **8 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

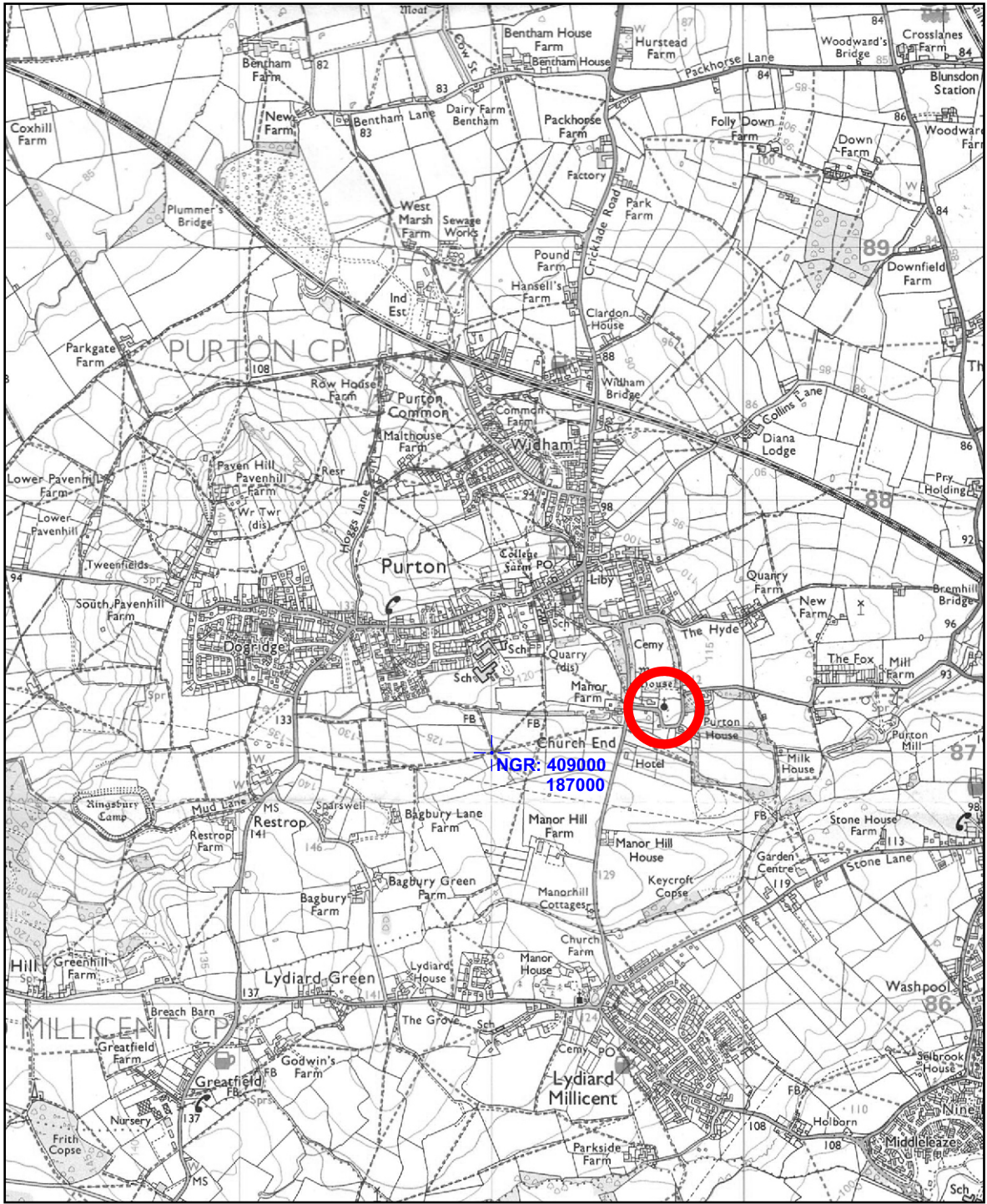
Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. 2014. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief*. Reading.

## **St Mary's Church, Purton, Wiltshire: Archaeological Watching Brief**

Foundations Archaeology. 2020. *St Marys Church, Purton, Wiltshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. Unpublished.

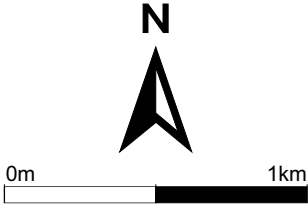
### **9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger of Wiltshire Council Archaeology Service and Paul Dempsey for their help during the course of the project.

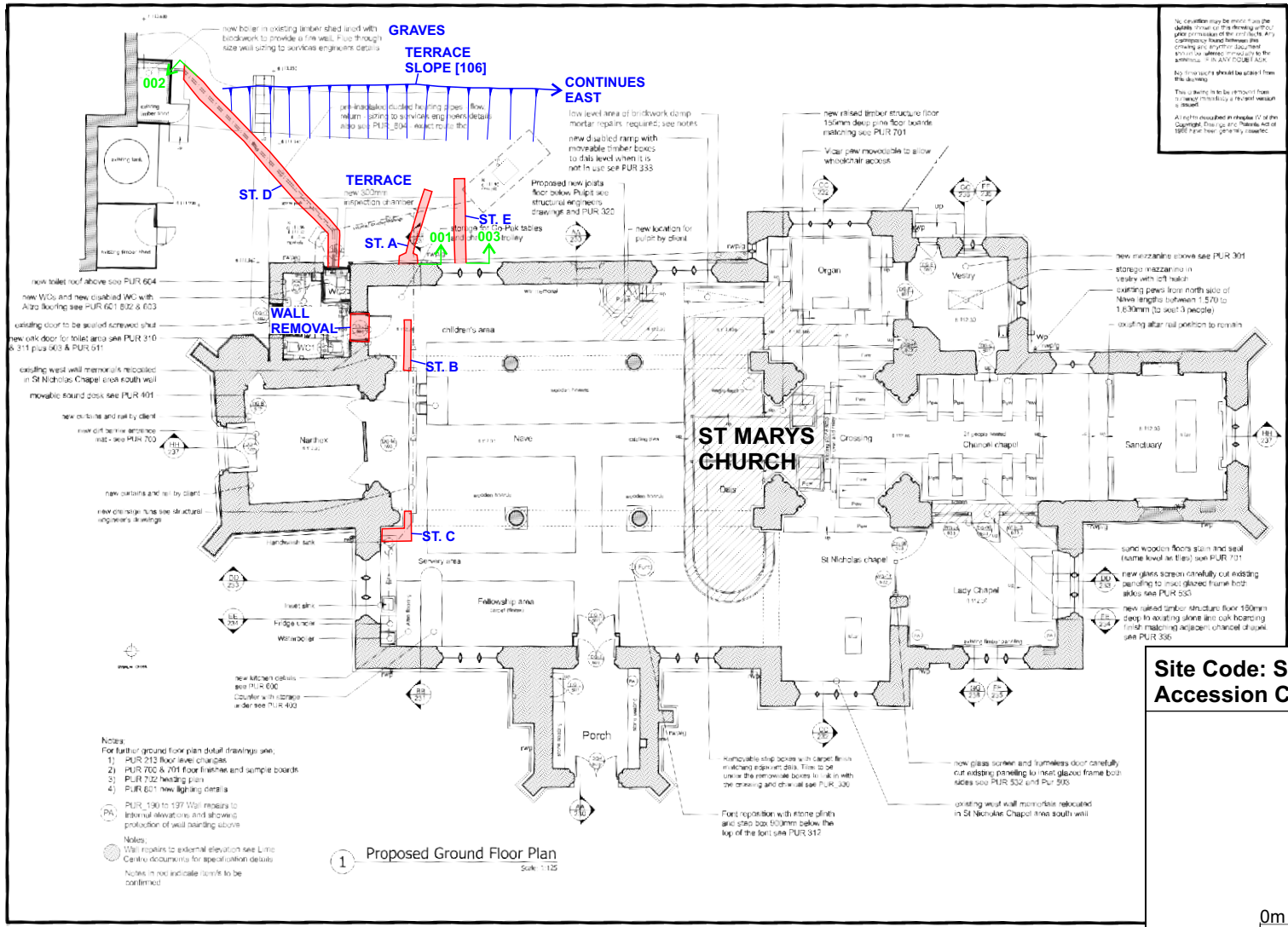


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**Site Code: SMP20**  
**Accession Code: DZSWS:07-2020**



**FIGURE 1: Site Location**



No elevation may be more than the details shown on the drawings. For the purposes of the contract, any correspondence between the drawings and the site shall be the drawings. All rights reserved in whole or in part. Copyright. Drawings and Details Act of 1988 and other laws apply.

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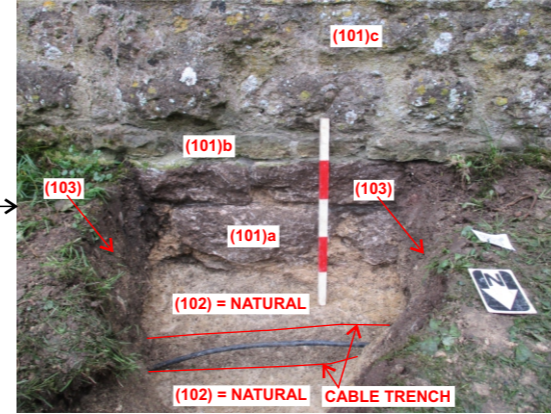
0m ————— 10m

ST. = SERVICE TRENCH  
**001↑** = RECORDED SECTION/ELEVATION

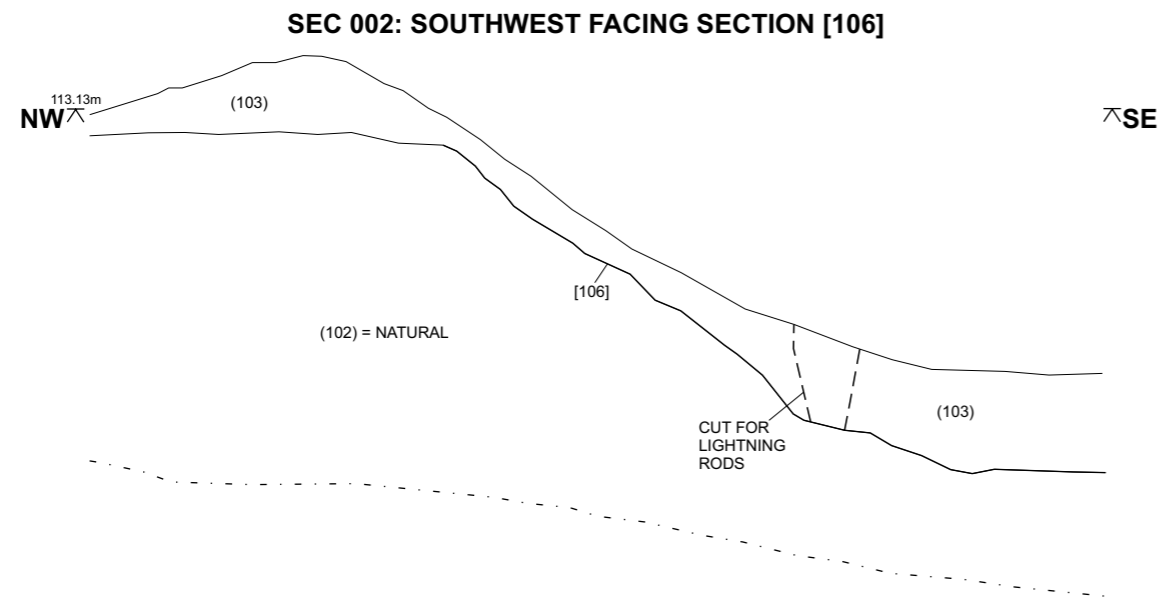
**FIGURE 2: Site Plan**



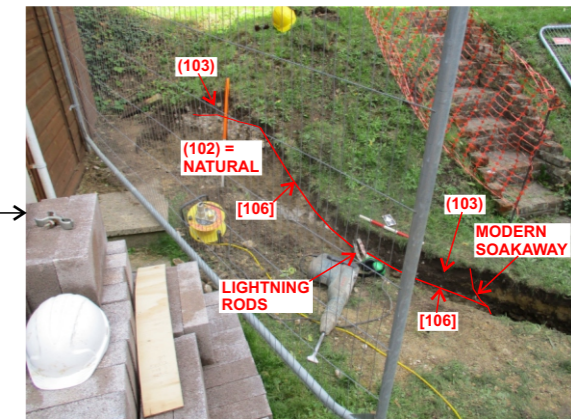
PHOTOGRAPH 1: SERVICE TRENCH A, SEC 001, SHOWING CHURCH WALL (101), NORTH ELEVATION



PHOTOGRAPH 1: ANNOTATED



PHOTOGRAPH 2: SERVICE TRENCH D, SEC 002, SHOWING [106], SOUTHWEST FACING



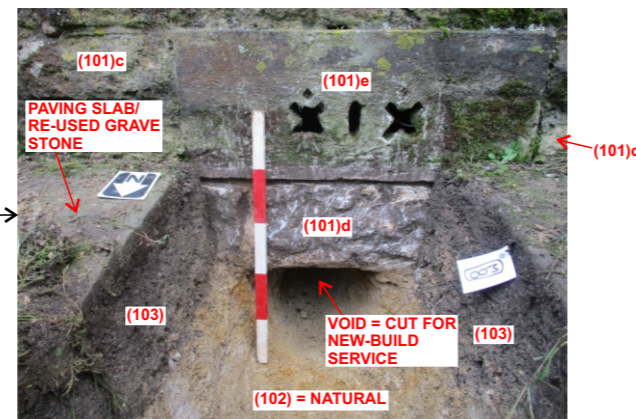
PHOTOGRAPH 2: ANNOTATED



PHOTOGRAPH 3: TERRACE [106] AT NORTH OF CHURCH, LOOKING WEST, TOWARDS SEC 002



PHOTOGRAPH 4: SERVICE TRENCH E, SEC 003, SHOWING CHURCH WALL (101), NORTH ELEVATION



PHOTOGRAPH 4: ANNOTATED

<p>Site Code: SMP20 Accession Code: DZSWS:07-2020</p>
<p>0m <span style="float: right;">1m</span></p> <p>APPLIES TO DRAWING ONLY</p>
<p><b>FIGURE 3: Exterior Service Trenches, Elevations and Recorded Section</b></p>



PHOTOGRAPH 5: SERVICE TRENCH B, LOOKING NORTHWEST



PHOTOGRAPH 6: SERVICE TRENCH C, LOOKING NORTHEAST



PHOTOGRAPH 7: INTERIOR WALL ELEVATION, PRIOR TO REMOVAL



PHOTOGRAPH 8: EXTERIOR WALL ELEVATION, PRIOR TO REMOVAL



PHOTOGRAPH 9: INTERIOR WALL STONES, EXPOSED AFTER REMOVAL OF WALL RENDER



PHOTOGRAPH 10: FRAGMENT OF INTERIOR WALL RENDER



PHOTOGRAPH 11: EXTERIOR VIEW AFTER WALL REMOVAL



PHOTOGRAPH 12: SOUTH FACING WALL SECTION



PHOTOGRAPH 13: DETAIL OF SOUTH FACING WALL SECTION



PHOTOGRAPH 14: DETAIL OF CHAMFERED STONE IN SOUTH FACING WALL SECTION



PHOTOGRAPH 15: BASE OF WALL EXCAVATION



PHOTOGRAPH 16: TOP OF WALL EXCAVATION, SHOWING BASE OF WINDOWSILL STONE SLABS

Site Code: SMP20  
Accession Code: DZSWS:07-2020

**FIGURE 4: Interior Service Trenches and Wall Removal**