

HERITAGE NETWORK



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN **Ashwell, Hertfordshire**

HN979

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ***MONITORING REPORT***



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD
Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation
Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

ST. MARY'S CHURCH
Ashwell, Hertfordshire

Project no.: HN979

Archaeological Monitoring Report

Prepared on behalf of Ashwell Parochial Church Council

By

Greg Jones, BA (HONS), MA AIFA

Report no. 711

March 2012

© The Heritage Network Ltd

11 FURMSTON COURT, ICKNIELD WAY, LETCHWORTH SG6 1UJ
TEL: (01462) 685991 FAX: (01462) 685998

Contents

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------|
| | Summary | Page i |
| Section 1 | Introduction | Page 1 |
| Section 2 | Fieldwork | Page 3 |
| Section 3 | Discussion | Page 4 |
| Section 4 | Schedule of site visits..... | Page 5 |
| Section 5 | Bibliography | Page 5 |
| Section 5 | Illustrations..... | following Page 8 |
| Appendix | OASIS data entry form..... | Page 9 |

The cover photograph shows the church looking south west

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Greg Jones. The identification and description of the jetton was provided by Gil Burleigh. The report text and illustrations were prepared by Greg Jones, and edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to: Ian Frearson, Freeland Rees Roberts Architects; David Baker, St Albans DAC; and Matthew Pinnock, R.J. Pinnock & Sons, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Site name and address: | Church of St. Mary The Virgin, Ashwell, SG7 5NJ | | |
| County: | Hertfordshire | District: | North Herts |
| Village/town: | Ashwell | Parish: | Ashwell |
| Planning reference: | N/A | NGR: | TL 26725 39790 |
| Client name and address: | Ashwell PCC, Church Lane, Ashwell, SG7 5NJ | | |
| Nature of work: | New drain & service installations | Existing land use: | Churchyard |
| Site status: | Listed Building | Reason for investigation: | Direction of Diocesan Faculty |
| Position in planning process: | n/a | Project brief originator: | Diocesan Advisory Committee |
| Size of affected area: | c.37 sq m | Size of area investigated: | c.37 sq m |
| Site Code: | HN 979 | Other reference: | n/a |
| Organisation: | Heritage Network | Site Director: | David Hillelson |
| Project type, methods etc.: | Monitoring | Archive recipient: | North Herts Museum Service |
| Start of work | 14/02/2012 | Finish of work | 28/02/2012 |
| Related HER Nos: | 5389 | Periods represented: | Medieval/Post-medieval |
| Oasis UID | heritage1-119287 | Significant finds: | Human remains, stone foundations, post-medieval jetton |
| Monument types: | Stone foundations. Human remains | | |
| Physical archive: | n/a | | |
| Previous summaries/reports: | Heritage Network report no.601, June 2010 (HN857) | | |

Synopsis:

In response to the requirements of a diocesan faculty, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Ashwell PCC to implement a scheme of archaeological monitoring during the installation of a new water service pipe, the re-excavation of three drainage trenches and associated soakaways, and the excavation of a new soakaway on the north side of the Church of St. Mary's, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.

The monitoring programme revealed a stone foundation, possibly representing a funerary monument, and also a small quantity of disarticulated human bone. A Flemish 'Venus' jetton was found independently by the contractors.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of Freeland Rees Roberts Architects, acting on behalf of Ashwell Parochial Church Council, as part of the archaeological monitoring and recording of the excavation of rainwater drainage trenches and associated soakaways, at St Mary's Church, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.

1.2 The investigation is a requirement of a Diocesan faculty. The present report describes the findings of the monitoring programme and is intended to complete the requirements of the faculty.

1.3 The study area, centred on NGR TL 26725 39790, lies in the churchyard immediately to the north of the church, which is bounded on the east by the rectory, on the south by Church Lane, on the west by Mill Street, and on the north by open fields (Figure 1). The works for the present project include the installation of a new water service pipe, the re-excavation of three existing drains and an existing soakaway, and the excavation of a new soakaway to be connected to one of the three existing drains (Figure 2).

1.4 On the basis of the location of the drains and water service pipe within a medieval churchyard and adjacent to a Grade I listed church, the Diocesan Archaeology Adviser recommended that archaeological monitoring of the groundworks should be carried out. It was considered that there was a risk that the drainage works would disturb human remains and possibly expose evidence relating to the construction and development of the church.

2. Fieldwork

SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 Ashwell lies on the north-western side of a range of low chalk hills which extend north-east from the Chilterns. The River Rhee rises approximately 400m to the east of the present site, which is located in the churchyard St. Mary's Church, and to the north of the church building. The site lies on level ground at approximately 49m AOD.

2.2 Locally the soils belong to the Milton Association (512f), described as 'Deep permeable calcareous fine loamy soils variably affected by groundwater. Some similar shallower well drained soils over gravel in places. Complex soil patterns locally.' (SSEW 1983).

2.3 The underlying geology consists of chalk of the West Melbury Marly Chalk formation (www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience).

METHODOLOGY

2.4 The timetable for the fieldwork followed the client's groundwork schedule. A number of site visits were made to supervise the excavation of foundation trenches.

2.5 The machining was undertaken using a 360-degree tracked mini digger fitted with either a toothless ditching bucket or a toothed bucket, as required.

2.6 All human remains were rapidly assessed on site for age at death, sex and any sign of obvious pathology. As the remains were disarticulated and did not represent a statistically significant sample of the population, it was decided that there was no justification for further detailed study off site.

2.7 No Project Design was requested for the present project. Nevertheless, all work followed the published DAC Brief, and was carried out both in accordance with the Heritage Network's documented practice, and with current standards and guidelines published by English Heritage, the Institute for Archaeologists, and others.

MONITORING AND RECORDING

Stratigraphy

2.8 The observed stratigraphy on the site consisted of a c.0.6m layer of grey (5YR 6/1) to light grey (5Y 7/1) clay silt with chalk graveyard soil under turf (Plate 1). The underlying natural substratum consisted of white (5Y 8/1) chalk.

Water Pipe Trench

2.9 A trench for the new water service pipe was excavated on the northern side of the church, running from the north side of the chancel to Mill Road following the existing churchyard footpath (Figure 2). It measured c.50m in length, was c.0.3m wide and had an average depth c.0.7m.

2.10 Immediately below the footpath, 5.5m west from the northeast corner of the north aisle and in line with an existing buttress, a stone foundation [01] was revealed, measuring c.1.25m wide by 0.65-0.70m thick (length unknown) (Figure 2, Plates 2 & 3). The foundation were

composed of clunch rubble in a sand matrix, and included at least 7 medieval tile fragments (Plates 2 & 4). It was laid on the natural clay substratum. No clear foundation cut was observed during the groundworks.

Drainage trenches and soakaways

2.11 Three existing drainage trenches were re-excavated on the north side of the church, and one existing soakaway pit (Soakaway 1). A second new soakaway (Soakaway 2) was also as part of the present project (Figure 2).

2.12 Drain trench 1 ran along the north side of the north aisle from the north porch to its northeast corner, before turning northeast to join up with Soakaway 2. It was anticipated that the trench would cross the line of foundation [01] and might reveal further evidence that would link it to the church building. No such evidence was uncovered although it is possible that the excavation of the original drainage trench had removed it. It is possible that foundation [01] represents a base for a lost funerary monument (Plate 5).

2.13 Soakaway 2 was 2m square, and was excavated to a depth of c.1.5m. The stratigraphy in the soakaway consisted of grey (5YR 6/1) chalky silt below turf. From a depth of c.0.6m, disarticulated and broken human bone fragments were observed and collected (Plates 7&8).

2.14 Drainage trench 2 ran northeast from the western side of the westernmost buttress on the north side of the chancel, to Soakaway 1. Drainage trench 3 ran northwest from the eastern side of the middle buttress on the north side of the chancel, to Soakaway 1 (Figure 2). No archaeological features or deposits were identified in the re-excavation of these elements.

Human Remains

2.15 Machine excavation of soakaway 2 revealed the disturbed and disarticulated remains of at least one individual.

2.16 The remains were examined on site and then reburied.

| Context no. | Depth below surface (m) | Age at death | Sex | Notes | Grid reference (TL) |
|-------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----|---|---------------------|
| (02) | c.0.6 | - | - | Large amount of disarticulated bone. Possibly more than one individual. | 26729 39793 |

2.17 The bones were in a poor condition and it was generally not possible to determine age at death or gender. On-site examination of the bones showed they consisted of part of the cranium, mandible, parts of both arms and legs (Plate 8). It is highly likely that the bones represent an number of disturbed burials. No evidence to date the bones was present, though they are likely to predate the marked burials.

FINDS ASSESSMENT

Ceramic Building Material

2.18 This assemblage consisted of 7 fragments of late medieval roof tile recovered from Context [01].

Recommendations

2.19 Given the small size and nature of this assemblage, no further work is proposed.

Copper Alloy Jetton

2.20 A copper alloy jetton was found by the contractors during hand-excavation on the east side of the north porch (Plates 9 & 10). This has been identified by Gil Burleigh, former Keeper of Field Archaeology at North Hertfordshire Museums, as a 'Venus' penny jetton struck in the Low Countries between about 1490 and 1550, probably either Antwerp or Tournai. It is closer to the original prototypes than many and probably is earlier rather than later in date, perhaps circa 1500.

2.21 The obverse shows an Austro-Burgundian shield (1482-1555) in five parts:

1. Austria (fesse) - represented by 3 horizontal lines.
2. Burgundy modern - 3 lis in a frame.
3. Burgundy ancient (bendy) - 3 oblique lines.
4. Brabant (sable: lion rampant) - lion rampant with 2 pellets in field.
5. Escutcheon of Flanders (lion rampant) overall.

2.22 Surmounting the shield is a crown flanked by Burgundian emblems consisting of steel, flints and sparks. The whole is encircled by a fictitious legend.

2.23 The reverse shows a standing woman (originally allegorical 'Peace - Hope - Justice - Love': latterly 'Venus') facing with long flowing hair tied by a bow and wearing only a drape. Her lowered left hand holds a pot from which she waters the flowers in the field. A bird, with wings closed and facing away from her, perches on her raised right hand, in which she also holds a single flower. The end of the drape depends from her right wrist. There are flowers in the field, a sign of an earlier issue. Her feet are within the inner circle with a rosette. The whole is encircled by a fictitious legend.

2.24 The Venus penny jettons were essentially reckoning counters made for the merchants of Antwerp during the 1490s. The earliest issues bear literate Flemish inscriptions and show a 'hand' initial mark which indicates that they were struck at the Antwerp mint. The literate inscriptions were rapidly replaced by nonsense legends and the initial mark was omitted. However, the jettons continued to bear the coat of arms of the ruling monarch, so it seems likely that their manufacture retained official sanction. The Venus jettons circulated principally among the merchants whose businesses were mainly centred on Antwerp, came to London in the course of trade. The Ashwell find is quite unusual outside London, where most examples have been found on the Thames foreshore.

2.25 The jetton is in the care of the PCC. It is the recommendation of Gil Burleigh, that it should be given to Ashwell Museum, subject to the agreement of the Chancellor of the Diocese.

3. Discussion

Archaeological Setting

3.1 The study area lies within Archaeological Area no.31 (AA31) which covers the medieval village of Ashwell and the cropmarks of probable prehistoric features to the south-east of the village.

3.2 Considerable evidence for activity from the prehistoric period onwards has been recorded from Ashwell and its immediate environs. This includes a finds of Neolithic stone and flint implements (HER 206 – 208) and a prehistoric occupation site at Westbury farm (HER 9672), approximately 750m to the west. Prehistoric artefacts have also been found at the springs of the River Rhee, approximately 400m to the east.

3.3 The area was well settled by the Roman period, an extensive Roman settlement, centred on a shrine, is known to the north-east (HER CB90) and excavation at Moules Yard revealed possible features of Roman date (HER 13707). Significant numbers of artefacts of this period have also been recorded from Ashwell, including coins and pottery sherds, found in 1977 to the south of the High Street, between 300m and 400m north-east (HER no 2973 and 4848). Coins have also been recovered from the area of the springs, approximately 400m to the north-east (HER 4848).

3.4 The Domesday Book of 1086 records that Ashwell was a borough and a substantial medieval settlement which levied tolls and other customary dues on its population. Ashwell's status is marked by the fact that it was the only borough and market town in North Hertfordshire.

3.5 This prominence is demonstrated in its many surviving early buildings: the Church of St Mary (LBS 162177) is noteworthy as a Grade I listed building completed in 1381; Ashwell Museum (LBS 162197), situated on Swan Street, is Grade II* and dates to the 15th century; Forresters Cottages (LBN 162145) comprising numbers 14, 16 and 18 High Street, are also listed as Grade II* and date from the late 15th to early 16th centuries

3.6 The present Church of St. Mary the Virgin is largely a 14th Century building, completed in 1381 with 15th Century north porch and aisle windows. It is one of the largest village churches in Hertfordshire, having the tallest tower in the County. It is listed Grade I.

3.7 Previous monitoring work undertaken by Heritage Network in March 2010 on the southern side of the church for drainage trenches and soakaways, revealed five groups of disarticulated human bones. Four of the groups (Skeletons 1 – 4) probably represented the burial of more than one individual, whilst Skeleton 5 may represent a single highly disturbed burial. The bones were generally in a poor condition, making it difficult to determine age at death or gender. Skull fragments from child burials may have been present in Skeletons 1 and 4, while adult males were represented in Skeletons 1 and 2 and adult females in Skeletons 4 and 5.

Current Work

3.8 The archaeological monitoring of the service trench and drainage works to the north of the church revealed a stone foundation of probable medieval date close to the north-east corner

of the north aisle, possibly indicating an earlier structure in this location, or an early funerary monument.

3.9 Disarticulated human bones were also revealed during the groundworks, possibly representing a disturbed burial of more than one individual. The bones were in a generally poor condition, making it difficult to establish the number of individuals, their age at death or gender.

Confidence Rating

3.10 In the course of the fieldwork, weather and ground conditions were acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. There were no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than *High*.

4. Schedule of site visits

| Date | Staff | Hours | Comments |
|----------|-------|-------|------------------------------------|
| 14/02/12 | GJ | 7 | Site inspection: pipe trench |
| 15/02/12 | GJ | 7.5 | Site inspection: pipe trench |
| 27/02/12 | GJ | 5 | Site inspection: drainage trenches |
| 28/02/12 | GJ | 6 | Site inspection: soakaways |

5. Bibliography

Archaeology Data Service: <http://www.ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue>

Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER)

Brown, N. & Glazebrook, J. 2000, *Research and Archaeology: a framework for the eastern counties, 2. Research agenda and strategy*. East Anglian Archaeology

Glazebrook, J. 1997, *Research and Archaeology: a framework for the eastern counties, 1. Resource Assessment*. East Anglian Archaeology

Heritage Gateway: <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>

Jones, G. 2010, *St. Mary's Church, Ashwell, Hertfordshire: Archaeological Monitoring*, Heritage Network Report No: 601

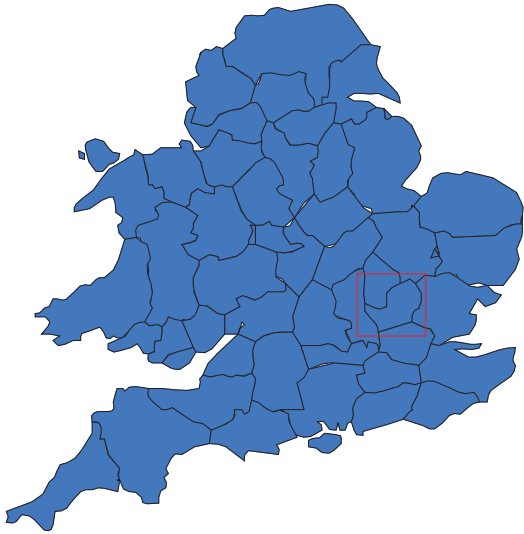
Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999 *Standard and Guidance for Watching Briefs*. (IFA)

Winter, M. 2008, *Land to the Rear of 48 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire: Archaeological Evaluation*, Heritage Network Report No. 495

6. Illustrations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Figure 1 | Site Location |
| Figure 2 | Trench Locations |
| Figure 3 | North facing Section of Foundation [01] |
| Plate 1..... | Water pipe trench stratigraphy long north |
| Plate 2..... | Stone foundations [01] looking south |
| Plate 3 | Stone foundations [01] in context, looking south |
| Plate 4 | Disturbed stone foundations [01] |
| Plate 5 | Re-excavated drain trench looking south |
| Plate 6 | Soakaway 1, looking SW |
| Plate 7 | Soakaway 2 looking SW |
| Plate 8 | Disarticulated bones (02) |
| Plate 9 | 'Venus' jetton, obverse |
| Plate 10..... | 'Venus' jetton, reverse |

Page left blank

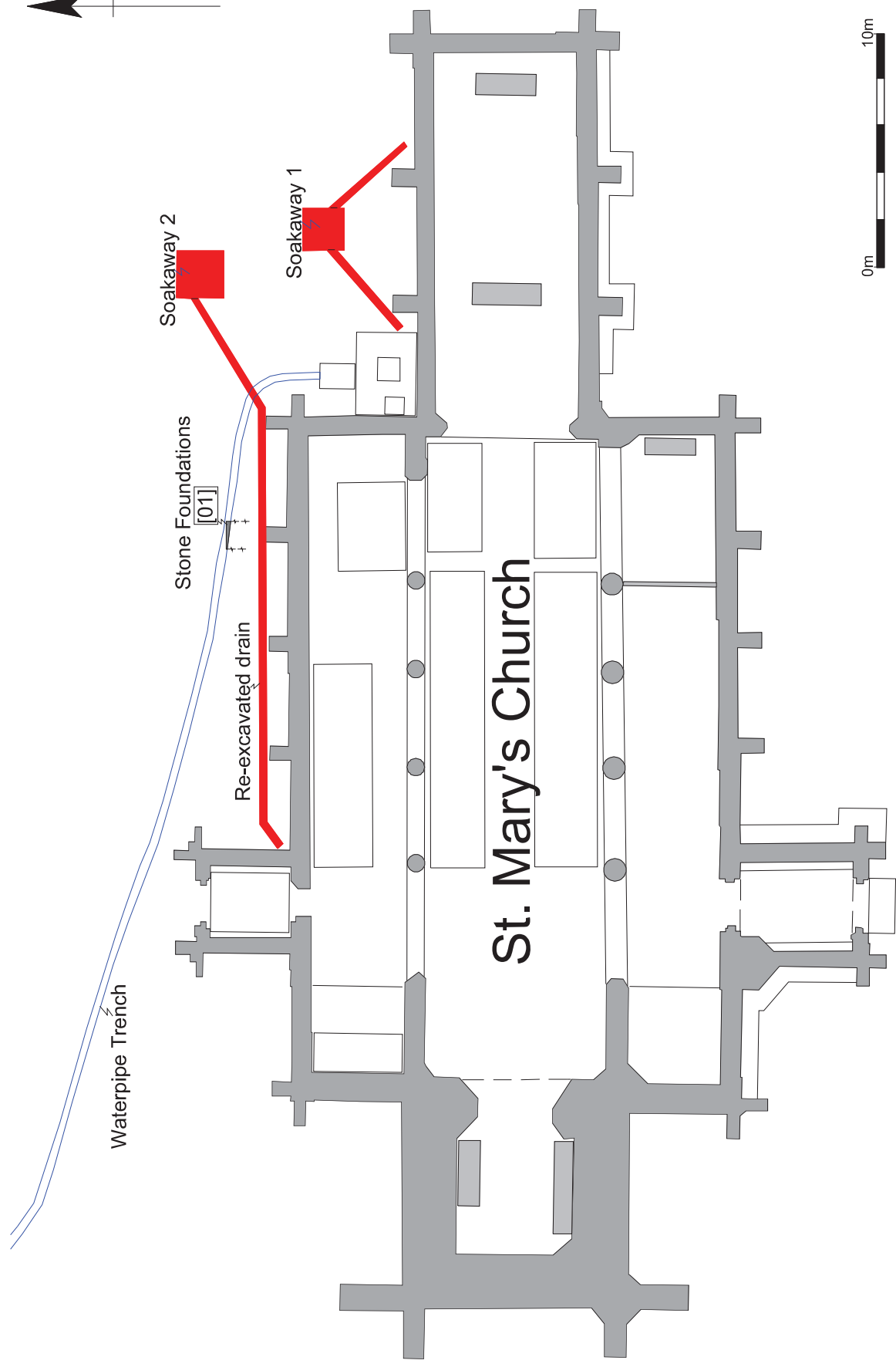


Site Location

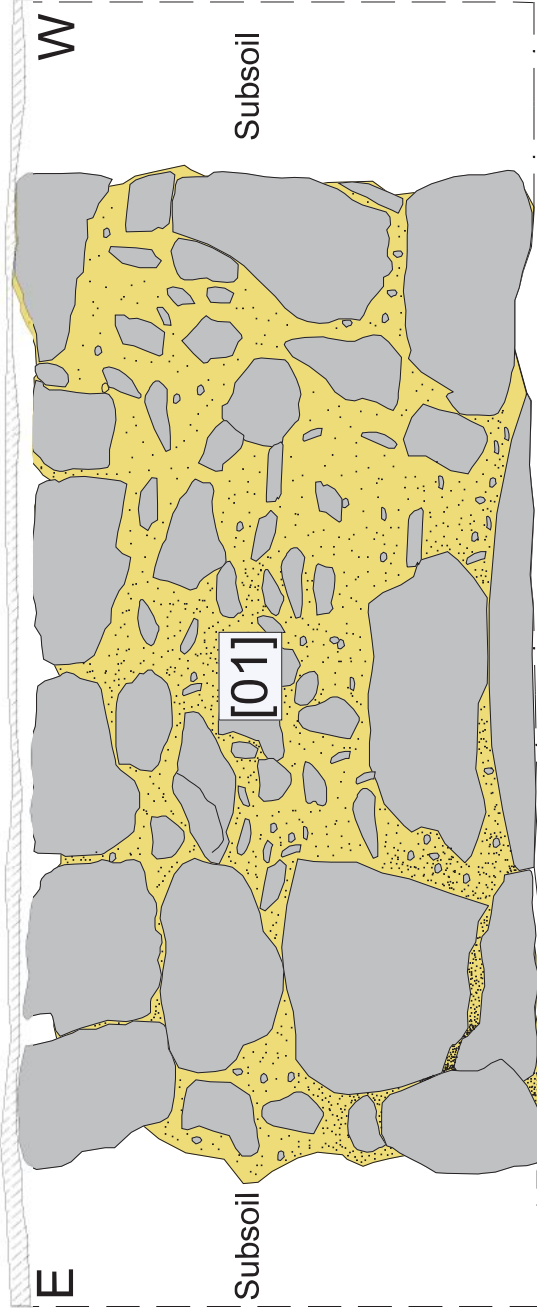
Scale 1: 5,000

(Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Licence no.AL100014861)

Figure 1



Location of Trenches



North Facing Section of Foundation [01]



Plate 1: Waterpipe trench stratigraphy looking north



Plate 2: Stone foundation [01] looking south



Plate 3: Stone foundation [01] in context looking south



Plate 4: Disturbed material from stone foundation [01]



Plate 5: Re-excavated drain trench on line of foundation [01] looking south



Plate 6: Soakaway 1 looking SW



Plate 7: Soakaway 2 looking SW



HN979
SOAKWAY 2
DISARTICULATED
BONES
(02)

Plate 8: Disarticulated bones (02)



Plate 9: 'Venus' penny jetton, obverse



Plate 10: 'Venus' penny jetton, reverse

Appendix: OASIS data entry form

| OASIS ID: heritage1-119287 | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Project details | |
| Project name | St Mary's Church, Ashwell, Herts. |
| Short description of the project | In response to the requirements of a diocesan faculty, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Ashwell PCC to implement a scheme of archaeological monitoring during the installation of a new water service pipe, the re-excavation of three drainage trenches and associated soakaways, and the excavation of a new soakaway on the north side of the Church of St. Mary's, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. The monitoring programme revealed a stone foundation, possibly representing a funerary monument, and also a small quantity of disarticulated human bone. A Flemish 'Venus' jetton was found independently by the contractors. |
| Project dates | Start: 14-02-2012 End: 28-02-2012 |
| Previous/future work | HN857 / Not known |
| Associated project reference codes | HN979 - Contracting Unit No. |
| Type of project | Archaeological Monitoring |
| Site status | Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI) |
| Site status | Listed Building |
| Current Land use | Other 4 - Churchyard |
| Monument type | Skeleton Medieval |
| Monument type | Skeleton Post-medieval |
| Significant finds | Human bone Uncertain |
| Methods | 'Watching Brief' |
| Prompt | Faculty jurisdiction |
| Position in the planning process | N/A |
| Project location | |
| Country | England |
| Site location | HERTFORDSHIRE ASHWELL St Mary the Virgin Church |
| Postcode | SG7 5NJ |
| Study area | 37 Square metres |
| Site coordinates | NGR - TL 267 397 |
| Height OD / Depth | Min: c.49m Max: c.47.2m |
| Project creators | |
| Organisation | Heritage Network |
| Project brief originator | Diocesan Archaeologist |
| Project design originator | Heritage Network |
| Project director | David Hillelson |
| Project supervisor | Greg Jones |
| Type of sponsor | Parochial Church Council |
| Project archives | |
| Physical Archive Exists? | No |
| Digital Archive recipient | North Herts Museums Service |
| Digital Media available | 'Images raster / digital photography' |
| Paper Archive recipient | North Herts Museums Service |
| Paper Media | 'Diary', 'Recording sheet' Drawing', 'Photograph', 'Report' |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| available | |
| Project bibliography 1 | |
| Publication type | Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript) |
| Title | St Mary's Church, Ashwell, Herts. Archaeological Monitoring Report |
| Author(s)/Editor(s)) | Jones, G. |
| Other bibliographic details | Report Number 711 |
| Date | 2012 |
| Issuer or publisher | Heritage Network |
| Place of issue or publication | Letchworth, Hertfordshire |
| Description | A4 booklet, comb bound, green cover, 10 pages, 3 figures, 10 photographic plates |