

Ambrey Archaeology Ltd

Archaeological Monitoring and Recording (watching brief) of Borehole Excavation at St Stephen's Church, Redditch

Version 1

Event No: WSM81835

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Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out in June 2025 by Ambrey Archaeology, of groundworks at St. Stephen's Church, Redditch (NGR 404138 267665).

It was undertaken on behalf of the trustees of St Stephen's, Redditch, who intend works to the church for which a planning application to Redditch Borough Council and Faculty application to the Diocese of Worcester are in preparation. The works include construction of a proposed mezzanine inside the church for which external ground investigation window sample boreholes were required.

Prior to the works a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Ambrey Archaeology and approved by Redditch Borough Council.

St. Stephen's Church is located in the southern part of the market place in the historic centre of Redditch. The River Arrow runs about 1km to the east, while Batchley Brook runs 50m to the north-west of the church with the Red Ditch just under 1km to the north-west.

Bedrock at the site is mudstone of the Merica mudstone group, with superficial deposits of Mid Pleistocene sand and gravel mapped.

Six window sample boreholes of 0.15m diameter were excavated outside the north-western half of the church. Investigation of the samples revealed shallow layers of made ground and subsoil with some evidence of drainage at about 1m depth to the north-west of the church. Natural deposits of sand and gravel were encountered at a depth of about 1m to the west and south of the church and at a depth of about 0.60m to the north. No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded.

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1. Background

This report describes the results of archaeological monitoring, carried out by Ambrey Archaeology, of groundworks at St. Stephen's Church, Redditch (NGR 404138 267665).

It was commissioned by Stella Power on behalf of the trustees of St Stephen's, Redditch, who intend to carry out works to the church for which a planning application to Redditch Borough Council and Faculty application to the Diocese of Worcester are in preparation. The works include construction of a proposed mezzanine inside the church for which external ground investigation window sample boreholes were required.

Prior to the works a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Ambrey Archaeology (AA 2025) and approved by Emily Hathaway, WAAS Historic Environment Advisor to Redditch Borough Council.

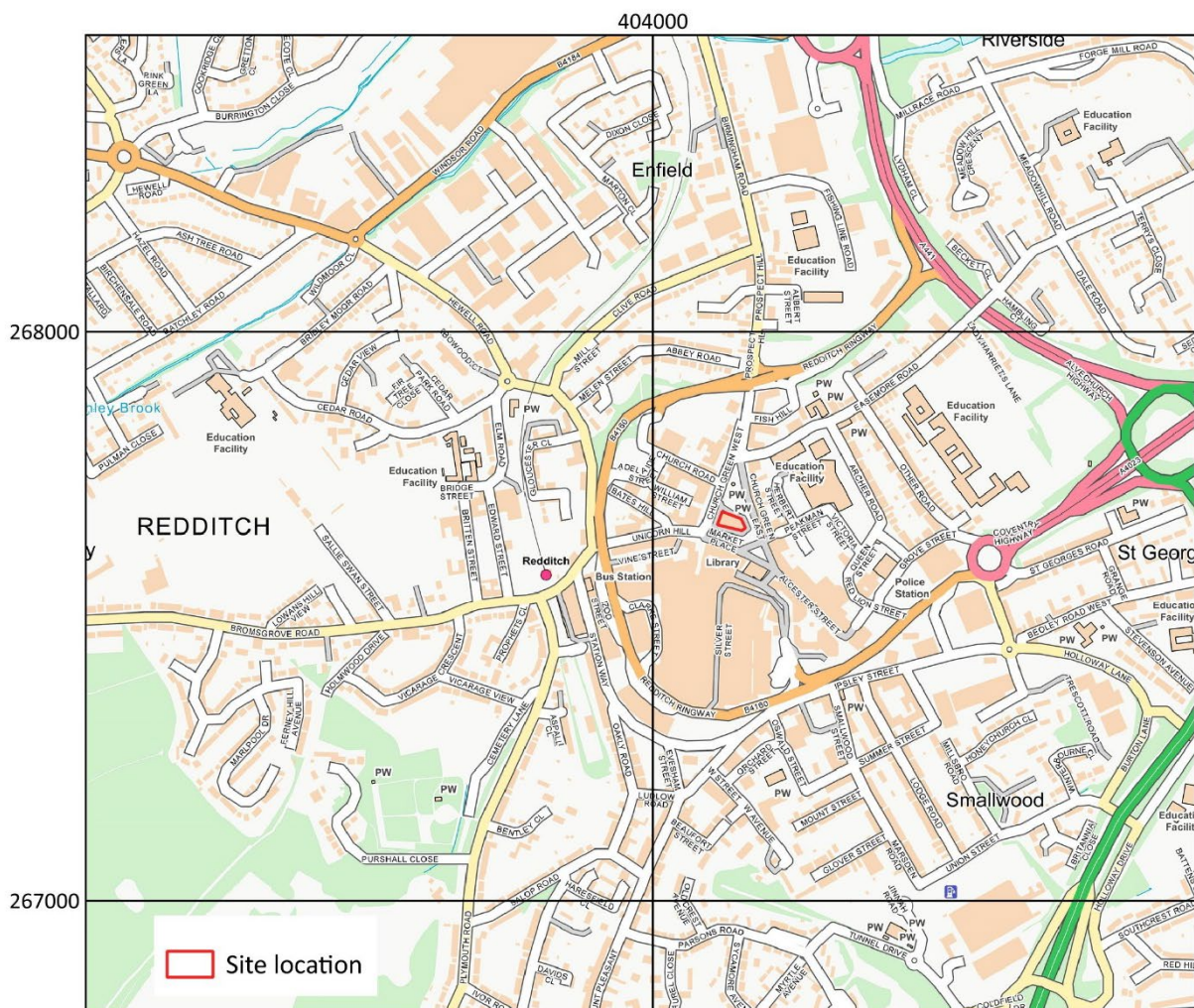


Figure 1. Site location

Base map: Ordnance Survey [2024] open data

2. Aims

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists defines archaeological monitoring and recording (previously known as 'watching brief') as a formal programme of observation, investigation and recording conducted during works carried out for non-archaeological reasons, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. This will be within a specified area or site on land, in an inter-tidal zone or under water (CIfA 2023, *Standard for archaeological monitoring and recording*).

3. Site location and topography

St. Stephen's Church is located in the southern part of the market place in the historic centre of Redditch. The River Arrow runs about 1km to the east, while Batchley Brook runs 50m to the north-west of the church with the Red Ditch just under 1km to the north-west.

Bedrock at the site is mudstone of the Merica mudstone group, with superficial deposits of Mid Pleistocene sand and gravel mapped (BGS, 2025).

4. Archaeological context

An event number for the project (WSM81835) has been provided by the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) and a search of the HER with a radius of 250m of the site was obtained (search ref #1710157).

There are numerous monuments and events recorded within this area. Those within the immediate vicinity of the site are depicted on Figure 2 and described below.

The site is located within an Area of Palaeolithic Potential (WSM56935) due to its location on Glacio-fluvial deposits of from Marine Isotope Stage 06 to Marine Isotope Stage 02 with a date range of 189050 BC to 12050 BC. These deposits may contain palaeo-environmental remains associated with glacial environments, particularly during deglaciation/glacial retreat. There is limited potential for unstratified/reworked artefactual remains.

Redditch was not recorded in the Domesday Book and is first documented as a placename in about 1200 when it formed part of the manor of Bordesley within the parish of Tardebigge. The Scheduled Monument of the Cistercian Abbey of Bordesley (list entry no 1005304) lies to the north-east of the centre of Redditch, on the south side of the River Arrow, south-west of its confluence with Batchley Brook. The abbey was founded in 1138 and demolished in 1538 following dissolution. The chapel of St Stephen within the scheduled area was constructed during the 13th century and used as a parish church for the local population. It remained the parish church until 1805 when it was demolished for its stone (HE listing information).

Redditch developed as a market centre with urban characteristics in the 13th century and developed around a large triangular green (WSM19813), within which the site is located, at the junction of the roads from Warwick to Kidderminster with that from Staffordshire to Evesham. The outlines of numerous tenement plots have been conjectured in the vicinity of the market place using map evidence (WSM19814; WSM19815; WSM19816; WSM19817; Dalwood 1996).

Redditch fell within the 13th century boundary of Feckenham Forest (WSM81835) a royal forest where the King had rights over game and hunting. Feckenham Forest was disafforested in 1629.

A probable moated medieval site (WSM70428) was identified by excavation in 1997 about 200m to the south-east of St Stephen's Church. A large ditch, approximately 6m wide by 3m deep, orientated E-W was recorded with a cobbled area to the north which may have been a trackway. Silty, waterlogged deposits lay within the ditch base. Possible re-modelling of the ditch and platform took place in the later 15th century but it appears from deliberate backfill deposits that the site had fallen out of use by the 17th century.

By the end of the medieval period the town of Redditch had declined to the status of an agricultural settlement. Industrial development in the 18th century was concentrated along the River Arrow (Dalwood 1996, 4). To the south of the scheduled remains of Bordesley Abbey, the Forge Mill, constructed in 1570 and remodelled and extended in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries is also a Scheduled Monument, (List entry 1005270). The buildings were converted into a needle scouring mill in 1729 that operated until 1958.

An urban regeneration took place in Redditch in the mid-19th century, evidenced by the railway and railway buildings, and industrial sites including a saw mill, iron and bronze foundries and numerous needle mills and related works. Several listed buildings to the east of Church Green date to between the late 18th and mid-19th century.

St Stephen's Church (WSM00009) is a Grade II listed parish church (list entry ref 1348619) built in 1854-5 by H. Woodyer with alterations and additions of 1893-4 by Temple Moore. The full listing description of the church is presented in Appendix 1. A War memorial to the south-west of the church is also Grade II listed (list entry ref. 1461624). houses in the plots immediately to the north. A triangulation station is shown at the site.

5. Methods

5.1 Fieldwork

The archaeological monitoring was carried out by Elizabeth Connolly, MA, ACIfA on 16th June 2025. The project was carried out to the standards set out in *Guidelines for archaeological work in Worcestershire*(WAAS 2024).

Six window samples, each of about 0.15m diameter, were excavated by an E3P Engineer outside the north-western half of the church in the locations marked on Figure 2. The number of window samples was different to that initially understood in the WSI but following discussion with Emily Hathaway of WAAS, it was agreed that the samples could be excavated at these locations.

Context recording was undertaken using context sheets and other pro-forma recording sheets and photographs were taken with a Nikon D3200 SLR camera.

5.2 Post excavation works

Following excavation, all context sheets were checked and cross referenced. Provision will be made to upload the digital archive of the project via OASIS (project id.: ambreyar2-535342).

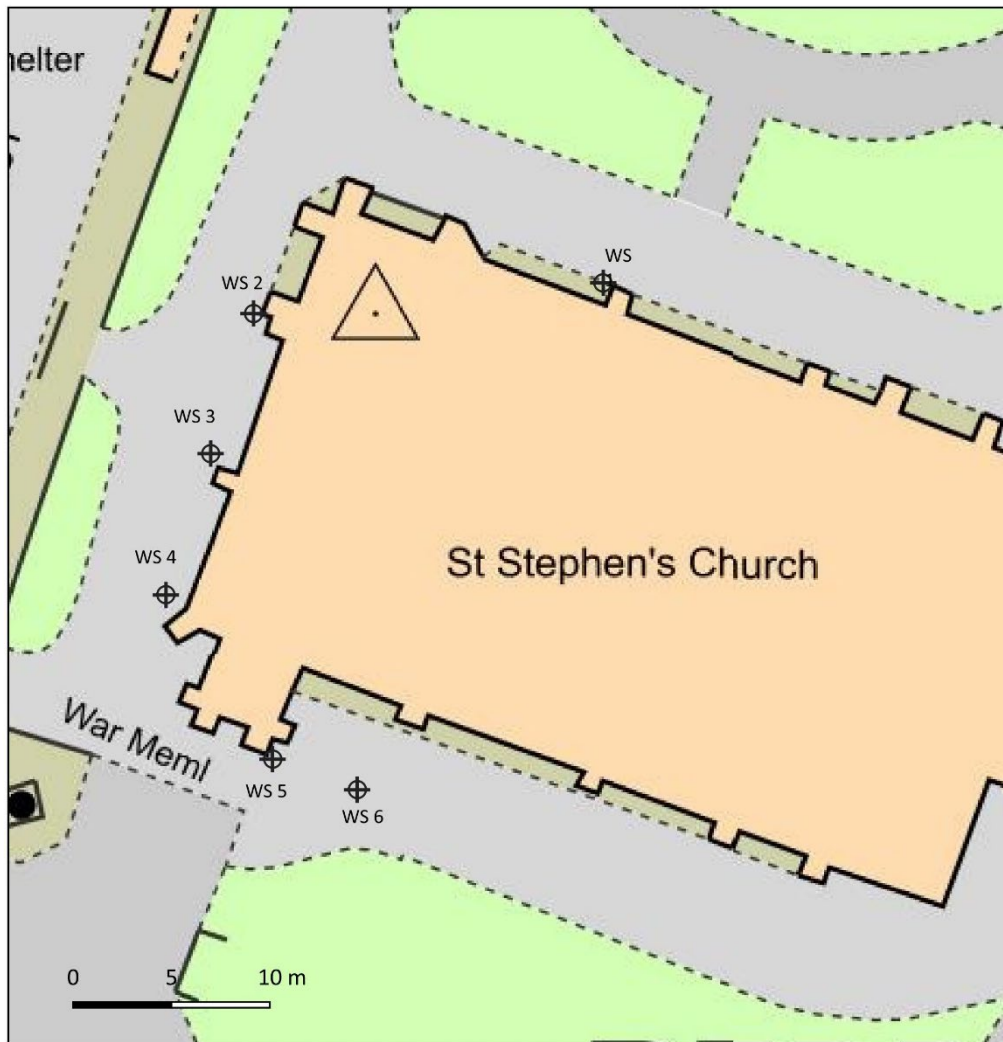


Figure 2. Locations of Window Samples 1-6

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6. Results

The works comprised six window samples immediately to the north, west and south of the church.

The results of each sample are outlined below.

Window Sample 1 (Plate 1)

Location: immediately north of church. Max depth – 3m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
101	0-0.05m	Tarmac	Ground surface
102	0.05-0.20m	Soft, mid brown sandy silt. Infrequent small pebbles and charcoal flecking and possible mortar	Topsoil
103	0.2-0.30m	Ceramic building material and mortar	Made ground
104	0.3-1.2m	Soft, reddish brown silty clay with infrequent pebbles and charcoal flecking	Subsoil/made ground
105	1.2 – 2m	Compact mid-reddish brown clayey sand which gets sandier towards the base of the context	Subsoil
106	2-3m	Soft reddish sand and gravel	Natural



Plate 1. Window Sample 1

Window Sample 2

Location: north-west of west entrance. Max depth 3m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
201	0-0.10m	Tarmac	Modern surface
202	0.10-0.30m	Gravel	Levelling deposit
203	0.3-0.60m	Loose reddish brown sand and gravel with small rounded pebbles	Subsoil
204	0.60m – 3m +	Loose reddish sand and gravel	Natural

Window Sample 3

Location: South-west of west entrance. Max depth 3m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
301	0-0.10m	Tarmac	Modern surface
302	0.10-0.30m	Gravel	Levelling deposit
303	0.30-0.70m	Soft buff to dark brown sand with frequent gravels and small stones of mixed size. Contained sherds of broken drainage pipe	Made ground
304	0.70-1m	Soft dark brown sand and moderate amounts of gravel	Subsoil
305	1m+	Soft red sand and gravel	Natural

Window Sample 4 (Plate 2)

Immediately west of SW corner of church. Max depth 2m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
401	0-0.10m	Tarmac	Modern surface
402	0.10-0.30m	Gravel	Levelling deposit
403	0.30-0.45m	Soft mid brown sand and gravel with small pebbles	Made ground
404	0.45-0.75	Loose buff brown sand and gravel	Made ground

405	0.75 - 1m+	Loose mid brown sand and gravel	Made ground
406	1m – 1.05m	Ceramic building material	Probable drainage
407	1.05- 1.15m	Loose, mid reddish brown sand and gravel	Subsoil
408	1.15 – 2m +	Loose buff red sand with lense of gravel	Natural



Plate 2. Window Sample 4

Window Sample 5

Location: immediately south-east of the south-western porch. Max depth 2m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
501	0-0.05m	Tarmac	Modern surface
502	0.05- 0.15m	Gravel	Levelling deposit
503	0.15 - 1m	Firm, reddish brown sandy clay with frequent gravel. Contained a large cobble and charcoal flecking	Made ground/subsoil
504	1m - 2m+	Red sand with frequent gravels of mixed size as well as rounded pebbles	Natural



Plate 3. Window Sample 5

Window Sample 6

Location: South of Church. Max depth 2m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
601	0-0.10m	Tarmac	Modern surface
602	0.10-0.20m	Gravel	Levelling deposit
603	0.20 - 0.35m	Soft to moderately compact sandy clay with frequent gravel. Contained rounded stones and pebbles of mixed size	Subsoil/made ground
604	1m - 2m+	Red sand with frequent gravels of mixed size as well as rounded pebbles	Natural

7. Discussion

The window samples revealed a shallow disturbed layer of made ground in the immediate vicinity of the church on the three sides that were excavated. In sample number 4 there was evidence of a ceramic drain at about 1m. Despite proximity to St Stephen's Church and the site's location in the former market place of Redditch, no features or artefacts of archaeological significance were uncovered during archaeological monitoring. Natural deposits of sand and gravel were reached at about 1m to the south and west of the church and approximately 0.6m deep to the north.

8. Acknowledgements

Ambrey Archaeology would like to thank the following for their assistance in completing this project; Stella Power for commissioning the project, the vicar of St Stephen's for arranging access and Emily Hathaway of WAAS for monitoring the project.

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