

The Church of St Leonard,  
Shirland, Derbyshire

An Archaeological Watching  
Brief, 2004

**Project No. 1128**

**The Church of St Leonard, Shirland, Derbyshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief, 2004**

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# **The Church of St Leonard, Shirland, Derbyshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief**

## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology at the Church of St Leonard, Shirland near Alfreton, Derbyshire (NGR SK400584). This was a response to the proposed excavation of service trenches to the west and northwest of the building and the installation of cables within the church. The church is a Grade II\* listed building dating mainly from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but with much earlier, at least 13<sup>th</sup>-century, origins. The service trenches were excavated to 1m in depth through areas of potential inhumation burial. No in-situ burials were encountered during the watching brief, and no archaeology beyond the fabric of the church structure was revealed.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Anthony Short and Partners on behalf of the parochial church council, to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Leonard, Shirland, Derbyshire. The work was prompted by the need to excavate a number of trenches for the installation of a heating system, electricity cables and drainage works. Four service trenches were excavated to the west and northwest of the church, and an area of flooring within the church tower was removed. The groundworks were monitored by Birmingham Archaeology on 16 January and 5-6 April 2004, according to a brief and specification prepared by Derbyshire County Council (Derbyshire County Council 2003).

## **2.0 Location**

The Parish Church of St Leonard is situated in Shirland, Derbyshire, approximately two miles north of Alfreton (NGR SK400584). The church is located on the east side of the A61, which forms the main thoroughfare through the village, and the service trenches were excavated to the west and northwest of the church.

## **3.0 Objectives**

To identify and record any archaeological deposits or features revealed by the groundworks.

## **4.0 Methods**

The excavation of trenches in the churchyard and the lifting of floor slabs inside the church were carried out under archaeological supervision. Sketches were made of the trench sections, and stonework exposed in Trench 3, below the west tower, was drawn at a scale of 1:20. These drawings were supplemented by photographs and written notes.

## 5.0 Results

### Trench 1

Trench 1 was orientated east-west and located to the west of the church between the western boundary wall and the footpath leading from the gate at the northwest angle of the churchyard to the west entrance (Fig.2, Plate 1). The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.45m for a length of 6m and cut through an earlier trench for a gas main. The trench revealed topsoil only, and no archaeological deposits were encountered.

### Trench 2

Trench 2 was situated to the north of the west tower, orientated approximately north-south for a distance of *c.*2m (Fig. 2, Plate 2). The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.5m through topsoil and revealed previous services. No archaeological deposits were encountered.

### Trench 3

Trench 3 lay in front of the western entrance to the church (Fig. 2, Plate 3). It revealed three courses of masonry beneath the current paving and an area of orange-brown silty-clay (Fig. 3). No artefacts were recovered.

### Trench 4

Trench 4 extended in a northwest-southeast direction from the western entrance of the church to the gateway at the northwest angle of the churchyard, for a distance of 25m (Fig.2, Plate 4). The trench was excavated, along the line of an existing paved path, to a depth of *c.* 1m. The stratigraphic sequence comprised a layer of crushed mortar and stone immediately below the path, *c.*0.2m in depth, and a layer of orange-brown silty clay, *c.*0.8m in depth (Fig.4). The area was heavily disturbed through tree root activity and no archaeological features were visible in section. The only artefact to be recovered from Trench 4 during the watching brief was a 0.18m length of oak peg from a timber-framed building (not illustrated).

No disarticulated bone was observed while archaeological monitoring was being carried out, but a number of human bones were recovered by the service contractors subsequent to the completion of the watching brief. These remains came from two locations (See Fig. 2) and included part of a human skull, which was discovered at the south end of the trench. These bones were lifted by the contractors and afterwards reinterred.

### Church Interior

An area within the church was observed during installation of a new heating system. The areas within the western portion of the church and the western tower revealed layers of clinker and ash overlaying a pale orange-brown silty clay to a depth of 0.15m. No archaeological deposits or features were observed.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

No *in situ* inhumations burials were revealed during the archaeological monitoring of the service trenches. This is largely due to the fact that the trenches re-excavated areas that had been disturbed previously for earlier services and did not, therefore, impact upon archaeological deposits. The longest pipe trench, Trench 4, arguably had the greatest potential to cut through archaeology. The fact that no burials were encountered, with the possible exception of the bones recorded by the contractors, suggests that the trenches were excavated to a level that was generally above any such archaeology. Also, the fact that the quantity of disarticulated human bone in the trench was particularly small suggests that there was a low intensity of successive burial in this area of the churchyard. Courses of masonry below the western tower are likely to be associated with the foundations of that structure, and there was nothing to suggest the presence of an earlier phase of the church here, or in any of the other trenches observed.

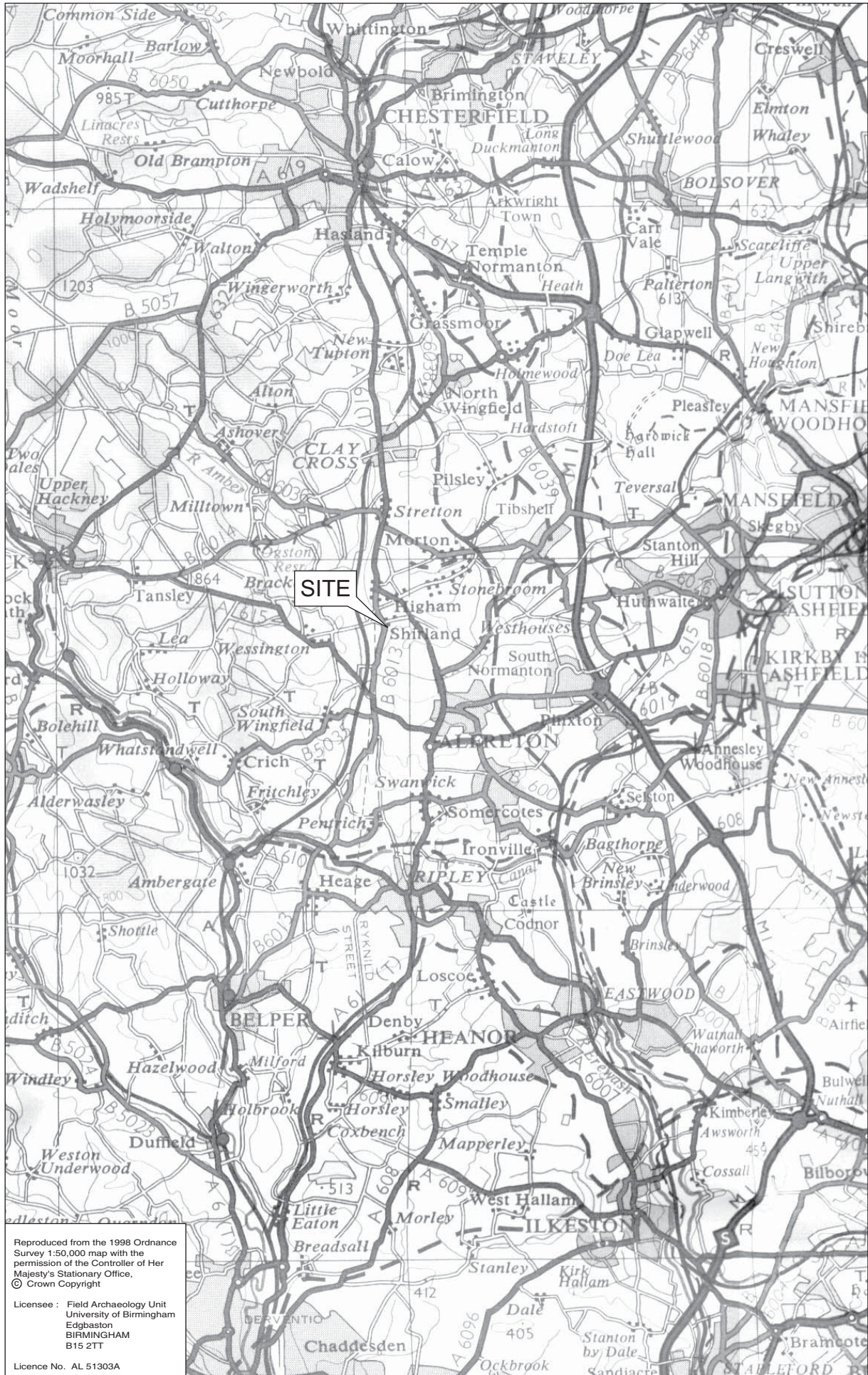
## **7.0 Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was carried out for Birmingham Archaeology by John Halsted, Malcolm Hislop and Helen Martin. This report was written by John Halsted and edited by Malcolm Hislop, who also managed the project. John Halsted also prepared the illustrations.

## **8.0 References**

Derbyshire County Council, 2003, *S. Leonard's Church, Shirland, Alfreton, Derbyshire: Brief and Specification for a Watching Brief and Report on the Excavation of Trenches Through the Churchyard.*





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Fig.1

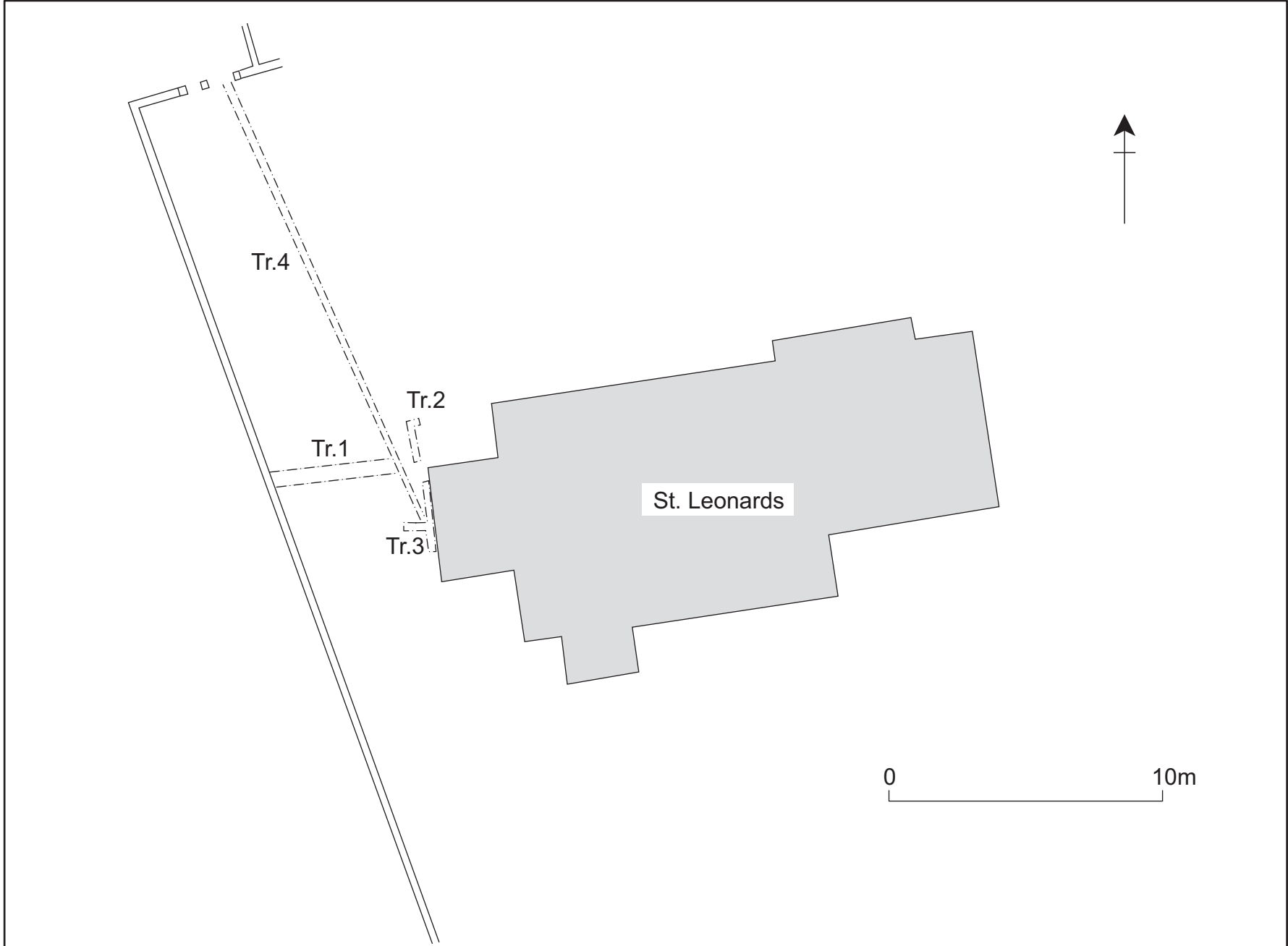


Fig.2



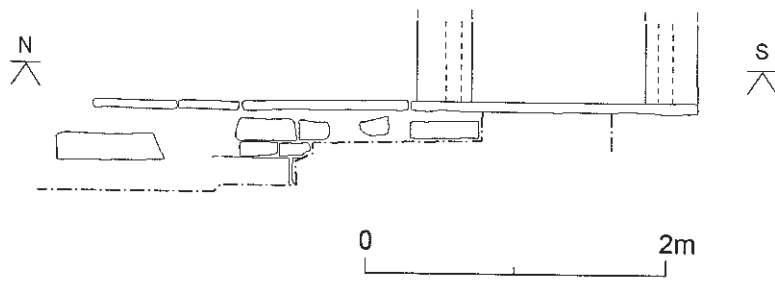


Fig.3

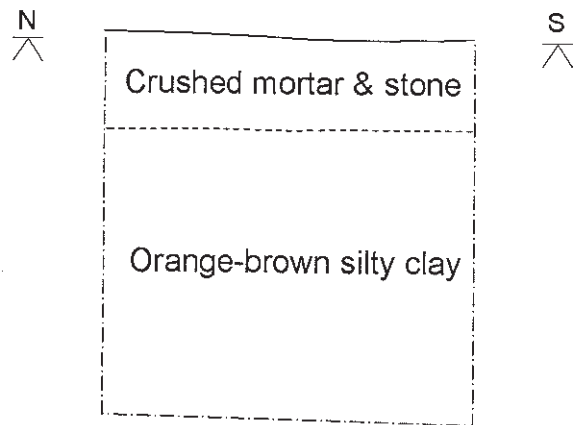


Fig.4

Fig.3



Plate 1



Plate 2





Plate 3

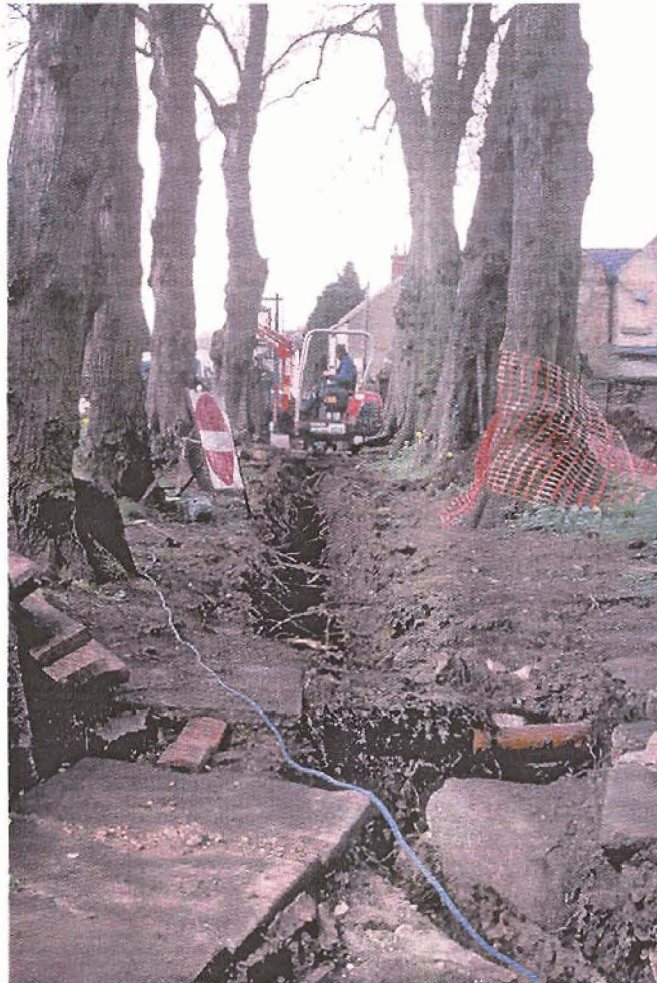


Plate 4