

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL MINOR MONITORING REPORT

## The church of St John the Baptist, Farnham Rd, Snape: Groundwork excavations for a new WC building in the churchyard.

<b>PLANNING REF:</b>	DC/20/1670	<b>HER PARISH NO.</b>	SNP 028 (the church)
<b>SIZE:</b>	Small scale (under 20sqms)	<b>OASIS REF:</b>	davidgil1-415692
<b>GRID REF:</b>	TM 39530 59380	<b>LISTED BUILDING NO.</b>	(Grade II*) 1231174
<b>SCCAS officer</b>	Dr Hannah Cutler	<b>FIELD WORK DATES:</b>	Nov-Dec 2022

### Summary

*The monitoring of construction groundworks for a small timber outbuilding (a WC) in the churchyard of St John the Baptist, Snape recorded a deep soil profile of mid brown sand, identified as the upper backfill of innumerable closely-spaced graves. The investigations showed that the burials lay 1m or more below the ground surface; they were beyond the depth of the groundworks and no in-situ skeletal remains were disturbed.*

### 1. Introduction

This report provides a record of the archaeological monitoring of the groundworks for the construction of a small WC outbuilding in the churchyard of St John the Baptist in Snape. The site of the new building was located in the NW corner of the churchyard and close to the west boundary, which until relatively recently fronted the Sternfield road (the re-alignment of the junction occurred sometime after the publication of the 1970 OS map). The main trench excavations were between 7m and 12m from the medieval church and in an area of no extant gravestones (Fig.2 and Pl.2).

The church lies within an historic landscape (see section 2) and the site was considered to be archaeologically sensitive with the potential to impact on burials and possibly earlier remains. As such, the local planning authority were advised that a continuous archaeological monitoring of the groundworks should be a condition of any planning consent. Dr Abby Antrobus of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service (SCCAS) prepared an archaeological brief (dated 16/11/2020) detailing the requirements for this work which was undertaken by David Gill during November-December 2022

The monitoring was commissioned by project architects (Nicholas Jacob Architects LLP) on behalf of the Snape Parochial Church Council and the project was funded by the community through local fundraising.

### 2. Summary historical and archaeological background

The church is listed as Grade II\* (Listed Building ref 1231174). It stands on high ground overlooking the River Alde valley at a crossroads on the route to Aldeburgh and is slightly removed from the modern village of Snape, which is 0.7km to the south (Fig 2). The church exists within a historic landscape on the north edge of what was once the medieval *Church* and *Wet Commons* (Historic Monuments Record ref: SNP 142). Tumuli (now ploughed out) are shown alongside the road on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps (SNP 004, 007 and 008) and in the 19th century a Bronze Age burial urn, together with an Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation cemetery, were discovered in the proximity of one of the mounds (SNP 007) -a site which was later the subject of a full-scale excavation in the 1980's (Filmer-Sanke and Pestell, 2001). Scatters of Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery (SNP 024) have been recovered from an area 25m to the west of the church. Features indicative of a medieval settlement, including a

very large pit (SNP 018), postholes, ovens and pottery scatters (SNP 031), have been found on the south side of the common, all within 30m of the church, and close to an 18th century farmstead referred to as *Snape Hall* (SNP 015) on the early OS maps.

A church with 8 acres is listed for the manor of Snape in the Domesday Book (AD 1086) and the current building of St John the Baptist probably stands on the same site. The north wall of the chancel includes an area of horizontal flint coursing, which whilst not being entirely indicative, is a construction technique characteristic of Norman masons but no other features exist that could be attributed to this period. The earliest datable part of the present church is the nave. This together with the piscina set in the south wall of the chancel date from the 13th century (Mortlock 2009), and the first recorded incumbent is *Sir William de Rurcham* in 1240 (from a list in the church). The south porch was added in the late 14th century and bequests from medieval wills suggest that the building of the tower (then described as the *new tower – novi campanile*) was begun in c.1446 (Cotton 2019).

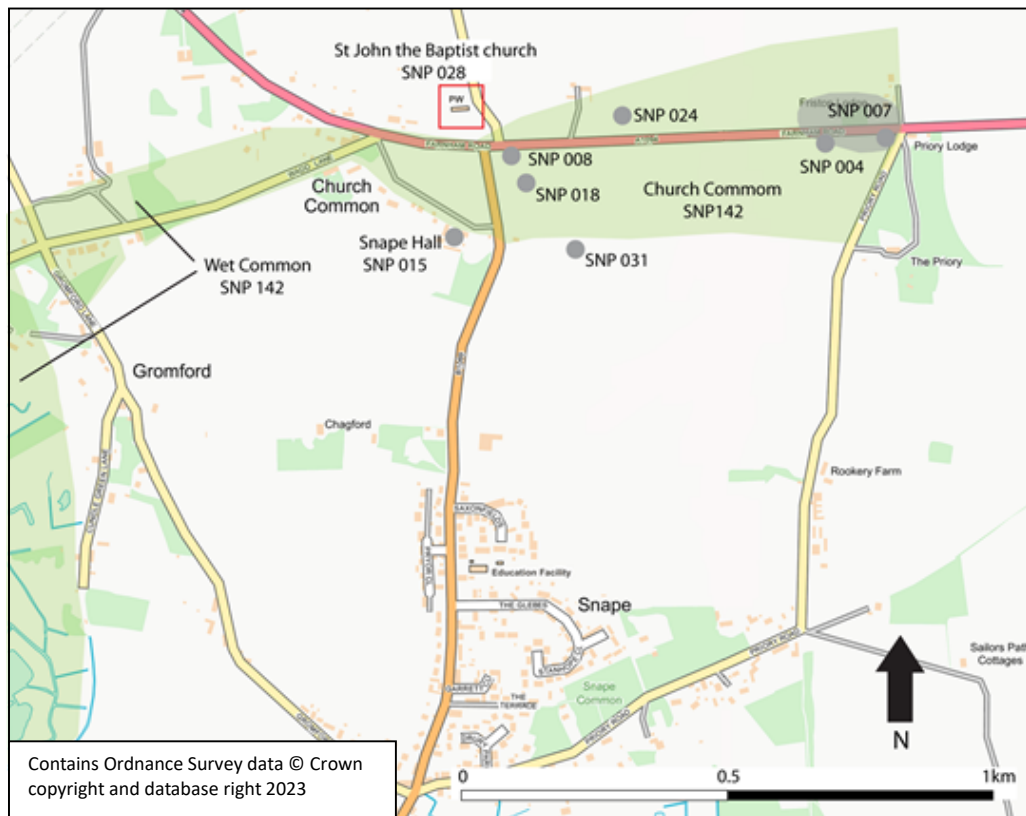


Figure 2. Plan showing the church in relation to archaeological sites recorded on the county HER

In the 16th century the chancel was reportedly in a dilapidated state and in 1920 the entire east wall and the roof were renewed (Mortlock 2009). The nave north door has been bricked up and this was done possibly when the church was extensively restored in 1864.

An additional burial ground on the east side of the Sternfield Road was opened in 1954, following the gift of the land to the church. Interments in the churchyard ceased in the 1990's except for a few legacy burial requests (Brian Boulton, church warden, pers. comms.).

The site lies within the soil region of Suffolk known as '*The Sandlings*', historically an area of open heaths and sheep walks. The superficial geology of the site is formed by glacial outwash gravels and sand, part of the Lowestoft Formation. The underlying bedrock is made up of carbonate cemented

shelly sands known as the East Anglian crags - specifically the *Chillesford Church [pit] Sand Member* (BGS 2022).

### 3. Results

The site plan (Fig.2) shows the spread of gravestones on the north side of the church and the locations of the observed excavations in the northeast corner of the churchyard where there was an absence of grave markers. The churchyard boundary is marked with a low bank and hedge, the bank possibly the result of the dumping of excess spoil from grave digging. The foundations for the WC cubicle and its soakaway were excavated into this raised ground level and the development area was about 1m above the height of the adjacent road.

The monitoring archaeologist was in attendance during the excavations of the raft foundation, arch drain and stormwater soakaway (Trenches 1, 2 and 3), plus their attendant drains. Each was recorded and the results described by trench below.

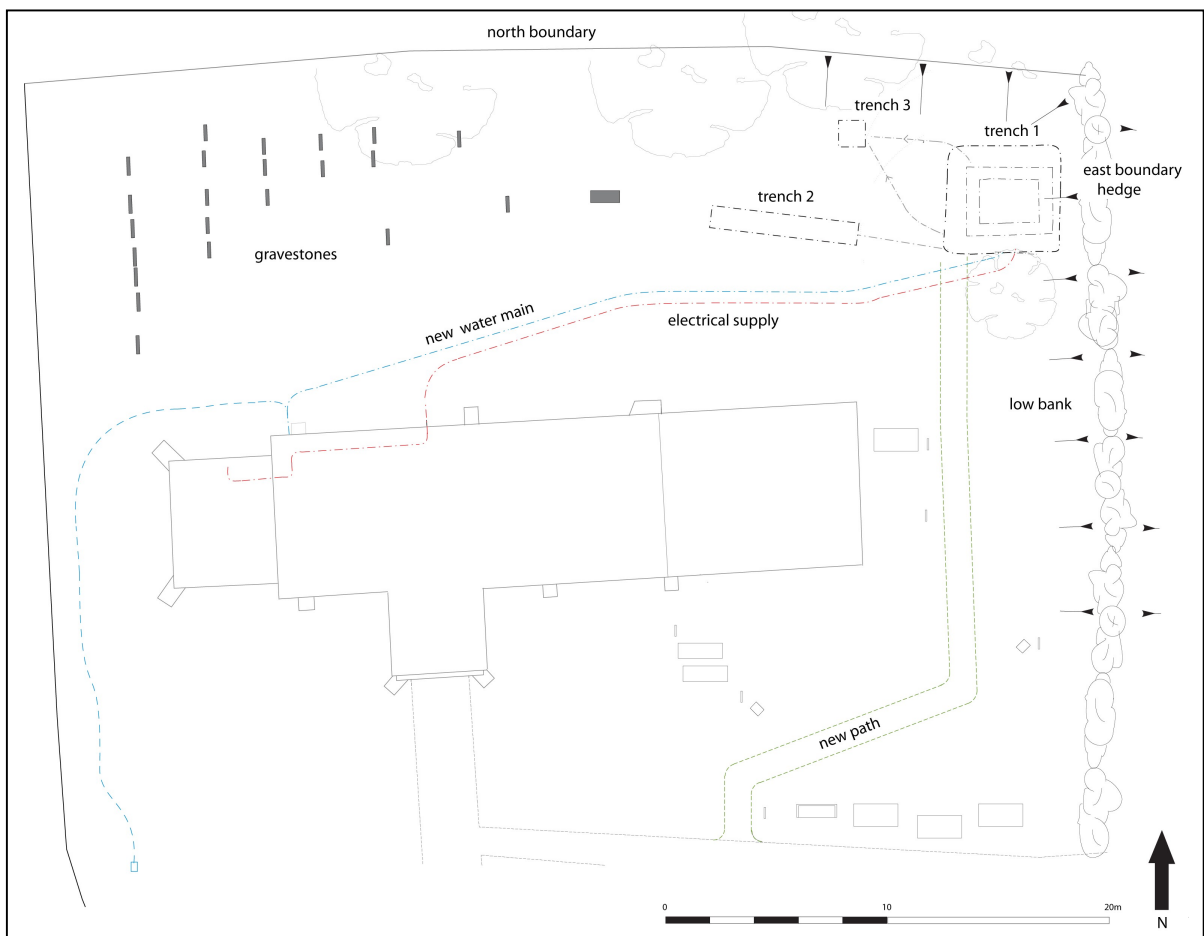


Figure 2. Plan of St John the Baptist Church and churchyard showing area of excavation.

#### Trench 1

Trench 1 was completed in two stages: firstly, an area of 5m x 5m was opened by a machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, excavating to a depth of 300-400mm, to create a working easement into which the timber formwork to cast a concrete raft foundation would be built; a further strip footing comprising trenches 600mm wide and 4m x 3m long was then excavated at the centre of the stripped area which would form a deeper 'toe' at the perimeter of the foundation (Pl.3).

The excavations were entirely within the depth of a re-worked soil; a mid-brown sand that was interpreted as the upper backfill of closely spaced and intercutting unmarked graves. The burials were likely to have occurred in the distant past as the outline of grave cuts were no longer visible at the higher level. The shape of individual graves could be identified, however, in the bottom of the deeper trench excavations, 700mm below the current ground surface. Here, small areas of natural sand between the graves was intact and the outlines of 5-6 graves were recorded in plan (Fig.3). The individuals buried within the graves were below the 'finished dig-level' and no *in-situ* articulated human remains were uncovered by the work. Only two pieces of disarticulated human bone were found during the excavations of Trench 1, this suggested that primary graves had not been disturbed by subsequent burials, as is the case when areas are used repeatedly, and there was only one visible instance of a grave being intercut.

Two post medieval bricks and a low quantity of small fragments of roof tile were collected from the upper soil levels, the bricks were a standard 2½" thickness, dating them from no earlier than the mid-19th century. Two large pieces of animal bone (a long bone and a fragment of pelvis from a deer) were also found in the upper levels, possibly discarded food debris, which may reflect the site's position on the margin of the churchyard and road edge.

#### Trench 2

The trench for the arch drain sewerage system was 7m long and 1m wide; to create the necessary fall, its depth increased from 600mm at the east end to 850mm at the west, with a step down to a depth of 1000mm in the final metre (Fig. 3 and Pl.6). The excavation over much of the trench length was within the depth of mid-brown sand, similar to layer 002 seen in Trench 1, and identified as upper grave fill. The trench depth was too shallow to distinguish the outlines of individual graves apart from at the western end, where a step down in the base of the trench revealed the edges of two graves. In one of these the top of a skull (facing east and therefore possibly an undisturbed *in-situ* burial) was uncovered at 1m below the ground surface (004, Fig.3). The burial lay just below the dig level, and it was left in place and the exposed bone covered over. As with Trench 1 there was a near absence of disturbed disarticulated bone within the upper fills suggesting that the area had not been continuously and repeatedly used for burial in the recent past. Small fragments of roof tile, plus a struck flint flake were the only finds recovered.

#### Trench 3

A stormwater soakaway, using a system of buried plastic crates, was located on the edge of the low bank/rising ground at the north edge of the churchyard. The excavated hole measured 1.2m x 1.2m and was 1m deep; the soil profile was similar to that observed in Trenches 1 and 2. The excavations were not deep enough to identify grave cuts and no human remains were disturbed.

In view of the negative results from the main excavations, the planned shallower excavation of the slit trench to extend the existing water and electricity supplies were not monitored, neither was the work for the new path that gave access to the WC building as this was wholly within the turf line.

## 4. Discussion

The design of the groundworks for the WC cubicle was conceived to minimise the impact on any underlying archaeology or human remains, and was successful in this aim. The monitoring showed that despite the absence of grave markers, burial had occurred in this part of the churchyard. The graves were closely spaced and therefore it is unlikely that any evidence of past (pre-churchyard) activity will

have survived. From the one example uncovered, the shallowest burials occur at about 1m (3ft 3ins) depth and were therefore beyond the reach of the monitored groundworks. Within the area sampled it was impossible to identify individual grave cuts from a high level (close to the surface) and the blurring of the soils over time, suggests that the burials here occurred a long time ago. The infrequent occurrence of disarticulated human remains within the soil, that would result from existing early burials being disturbed by subsequent grave-digging, might imply that this corner of the churchyard was not continually re-used and that the large area to the south of the church was the burial place of choice.

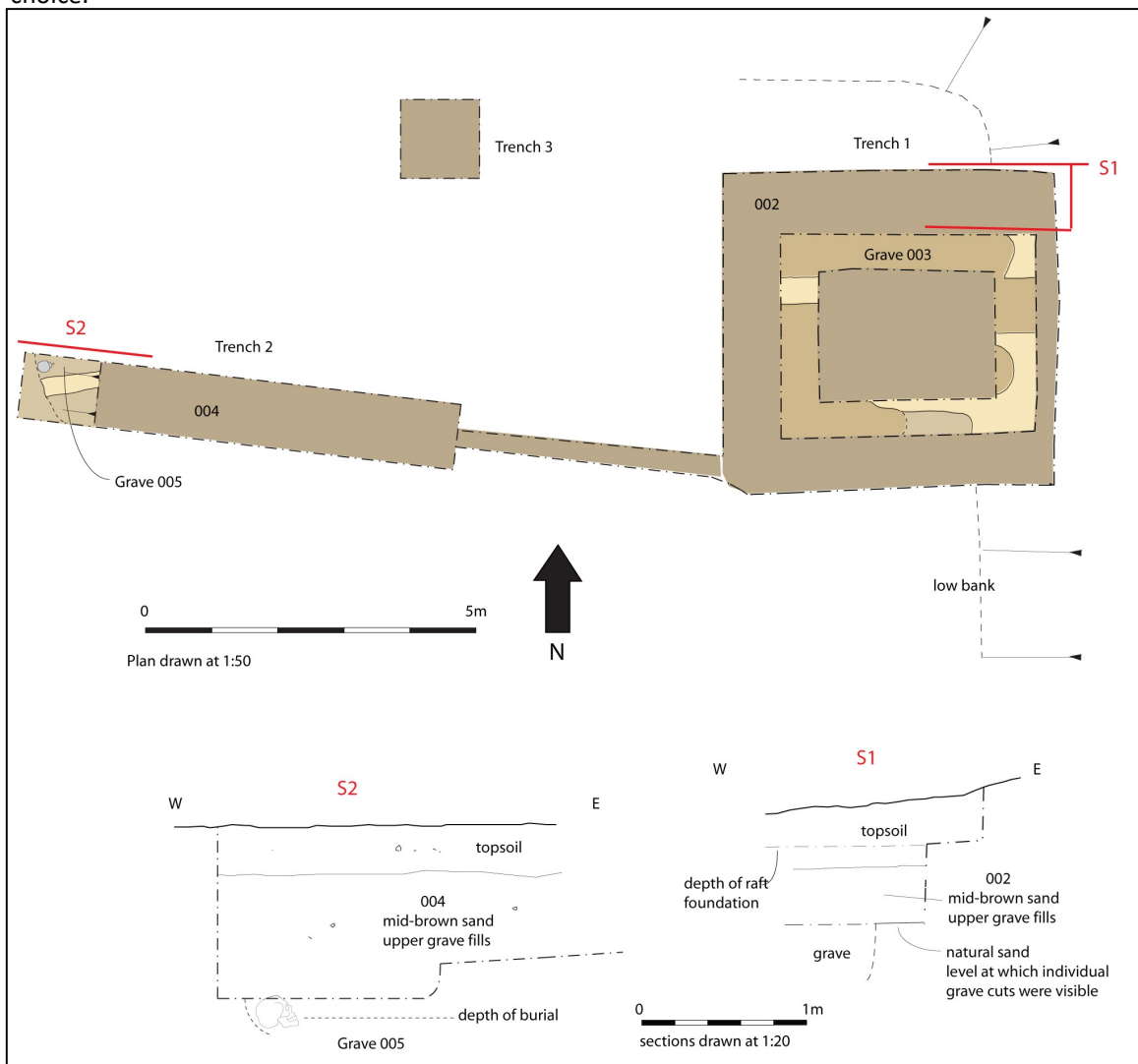


Figure 3. Plan and sections

David Gill 12/01/2023

## 5. Bibliography

BGS, 2022 (British Geological Survey), *Geology of Britain Viewer*: <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/geology-of-britain-viewer/> Accessed 15 January 2023

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Filmer-Sankey, W. and Pestell, T. 2001 *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery: Excavations and Surveys 1824–1992*. East Anglian Archaeology 25 (Ipswich, Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service: East Anglian Archaeology report 95)

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## Appendix 1: Plates



Plate 1 (left) The church of St John the Baptist viewed from the SE. The nave and chancel have 13th century origins, the porch was added in the late 14th and the 'new' tower added in the mid-15th centuries. The church is set back from the road within a large churchyard set out predominantly to the south

Plate 2 (right). Excavation of new WC site which was located in the NE corner of the churchyard and c.12m from the church; it was situated in an area where there were no extant gravestones



Plate 3 (left). Trench 1 groundworks. The WC was to have a raft foundation measuring 4m x 3m with a deep 'toe' around its perimeter (the slit trench); it was centred in a larger stripped area, measuring 5m x 5m, to enable the construction of timber formwork in which the foundation would be cast.

Photograph taken looking east, scales 2m. The additional graveyard, opened in 1954, can be seen on the opposite side of the road



Plate 4. The arch drain trench was west of the site of the new WC (seen in the background). The arch drain trench was 7m long and 1m wide, increasing in depth from 600mm to 850mm, east to west. The scales are 2m long.



Plate 5 Section showing the depth of brown sand (grave upper backfill) in section S1, Trench 1. Scales 30cms



Plate 6. The excavation of Trench 2 shows largely undifferentiated grave fills across the complete length and depth of the excavation. The small patch of yellow sand is the undisturbed natural between two graves