



St Peter's Church, Benington, Hertfordshire

Precautionary Archaeological Attendance, Observation, Recording, and Reporting

Albion Archaeology Project No: BE 1147

Report No: 2006/29

Produced for: John Glanfield & Partners on behalf of St Peter's PCC

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Introduction

Building works were commissioned at St Peter's Church, Benington, to install a kitchen and toilet within the church tower and to route a water and sewer pipe between the tower and the main road. The church lies at the western edge of Benington village, Hertfordshire, centred at TL 29691 / 23579 (Figure 1).

Given its location in the historic core of Benington, the site is potentially of archaeological significance. The existence of an adjacent castle site to the north suggests there may have been an earlier church on the site; the current building dates from the late 13th / early 14th century. Accordingly, the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser issued a brief¹ for archaeological attendance and recording of any archaeological evidence affected or revealed by the groundworks. Albion Archaeology was commissioned by John Glanfield & Partners to carry out this work on behalf of the PCC.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Turner (Archaeological Supervisor) under the management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager). This report has been prepared by Ian Turner, with figures by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician).

Fieldwork methodology

The trenches and manholes were machine excavated using a mini digger. The trenches were c. 0.30m wide. The longest section of trench ran parallel with the church and was c. 63m long. The depth of the trenches ranged from 0.30m to 1.50m.

The machining was monitored for the presence of human remains and deposits or artefacts of archaeological significance. The sides of the trenches were examined and the spoil was scanned. A detailed record of the deposits revealed in the pipe trenches is set out below. At regular intervals, representative records (in section) were made of the sequence of deposits in the sides of the pipe trench (see Figure 1 for locations).

The removal of plaster and flooring from the interior of the tower was monitored and recorded. The masonry structure of the tower was recorded as revealed by a 1.30m long,

¹ DAA 2005, Brief for Precautionary Archaeological Attendance, Observation, Recording and Reporting at the Church of St Peter, Benington, Hertfordshire



0.25m wide, 0.15m high hole chiselled through the base of the tower fabric in order to facilitate the connection of sewage and water pipes.

Summary results

No archaeological deposits earlier than the post-medieval period were identified in the trenches. No human remains were encountered.

The absence of any human remains in the pipe trenches, despite some trenches reaching a depth of 1.50m, suggests that the position of the path to the church has not moved during the time the churchyard has been used as a burial ground.

Layers identified within the pipe trench suggest that the ground to the south-east of the church has been raised by *c.*0.60m and terraced in the post-medieval period.

Trench 5, which followed the route of the path to the south of and parallel with the church, revealed two to three built up layers, some of which contained post-medieval brick and tile fragments. The built up ground varied in depth from 0.28m to 0.58m. This suggests that the ground to the south-east of the church has been built up and levelled or 'terraced' to a height of at least 0.58m. The built up ground may increase in thickness further to the south-east.

The raising and levelling of the ground was also clearly evident in the layers revealed in Trench 7. Four built up layers totalling 0.84m in thickness were revealed in this trench. They increased in thickness as the bank rose from the road to the ground level within the churchyard.

The hole cut through the fabric of the church tower revealed that the tower base was 1.31m thick. No rubble core was encountered; the mortar was set hard throughout the wall fabric. Differences between the interior and exterior faces of the tower suggest it may have been re-faced in the post-medieval period.

Detailed description of trenches

(Numbers in brackets, e.g. wall (100), refer to contexts recorded on site. Full context descriptions are retained in the project archive.)

Trench 1 – The cut through the tower wall

'Trench 1' describes the cut made through the masonry of the church tower for the sewer and water pipes. The cut was 0.50m wide and 0.25m deep at its widest point, on the outer surface of the tower, narrowing to *c.*0.20m diameter in the centre of the wall.

The cut revealed that the tower was 1.31m thick at this point. The wall consisted of flint nodules, roughly hewn (100), bonded with a light white grey mortar. No loose rubble core was detected. The flints were solidly mortared in place through the entire thickness of the lower wall, the hardness of the material causing some difficulty to the builder when chiselling out the access channel for the pipes.

Stone edging blocks (101) were set into wall (100) at 0.22m above the modern surface as the thickness of the tower decreased slightly. At the outer base of the tower a levelling layer (102) was identified.



It was noted that the appearance of the outer face of the tower (100) differed from the exposed inner face (105). The interior flints were undressed and more varied in size (see Figure 1 inset). The interior mortar was also slightly softer. This contrast may be due to post-medieval re-facing of the exterior of the tower.

The access cut also revealed some details of the floor construction within the tower. The modern wooden block flooring was removed to reveal a stone block floor (103) over a levelling / bonding layer of mortar with post-medieval brick fragments and stones (104).

Trench 2 - Sample Section 1

Trench 2 was 3.50m long, 0.60m wide and 0.30m deep. At its north-eastern end, levelling layers (202) and (201) were recorded beneath the current brick surface. Rain gully (203) butted up to the tower for a distance of 2.30m. At its south-western end, levelling layers (200) and (204) were recorded beneath the modern-day gravel path (205).

Trench 3 - Sample Section 10

Trench 3 was on the site of a manhole, measuring 1.10m long, 0.75m wide and 0.60m deep. The modern-day gravel path (302) overlay levelling layer (301), which in turn sealed re-deposited chalky boulder clay (300). The latter contained a fragment of possible late medieval oxidised pottery.

Trench 4 - Sample Section 2

Trench 4 was 9.50m long, 0.30m wide and 0.62m deep. The modern-day gravel path (402) and its associated levelling layer (401) sealed chalky boulder clay (400) at a depth of c.0.25m.

Trench 5 - Sample Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Trench 5 was 63m long, 0.30m wide and ranged in depth from 0.75m to 1.50m (see Figure 1 inset).

At the south-western end of the trench the modern-day path and its levelling layer sealed layers of build up, which had presumably been laid to raise the ground level. These included re-deposited chalky boulder clay, e.g. (510), and re-deposited chalk, e.g. (505). Fragments of red brick in these layers suggest a post-medieval date. Similar deposits were recorded at the north-eastern end of the trench, although they increased in thickness towards the road.

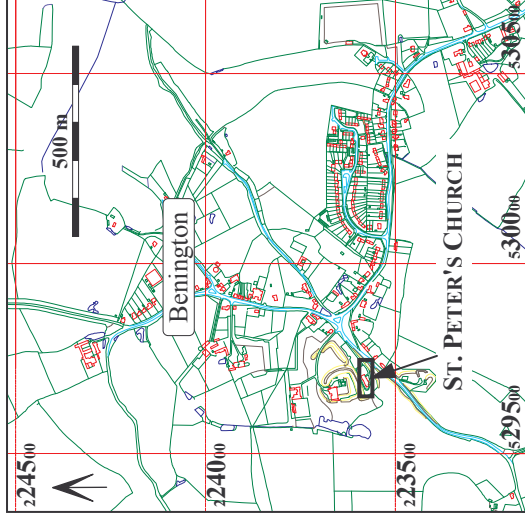
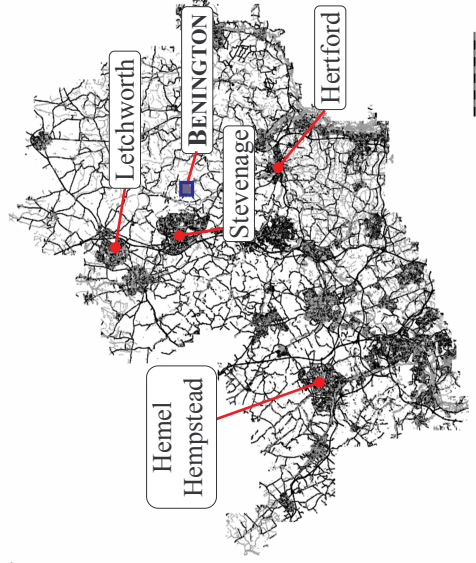
Chalk bedrock, sealed by chalky boulder clay, was encountered at a depth of 0.68m in the south-western end of the trench. The same material was recorded at a depth of 1.45m in the north-eastern end of the trench, which presumably accounts for the greater thickness of build up / levelling in this part of the churchyard.

Trench 6 - Sample Section 8

Trench 6 was on the site of a manhole, measuring 2.40m long, 0.90m wide and 1.50m deep. The brick foundation (605) of a former church gate was encountered at a depth of 0.26m, beneath the modern-day path and its levelling layer. Build up layers of re-deposited chalk (605) (602) and boulder clay (603) sealed undisturbed boulder clay at a depth of 0.50m. The boulder clay was almost 1m thick at this point; chalk bedrock was not reached.

Trench 7- Sample Section 9

Trench 7 ran at right angles from Trench 5 down sloping ground to the modern road. It was 14.50m long, 0.30m wide and 1.10m deep. Topsoil (704) sealed a 0.58m thick series of build up layers, including both re-deposited chalk (701) and boulder clay (703) (702). This material incorporated occasional brick and tile fragments. Undisturbed chalky boulder clay was recorded at a depth of 0.85m.



The exposed interior face of the tower.
Scale 2m in 0.50m divisions



Trench 5, facing west.

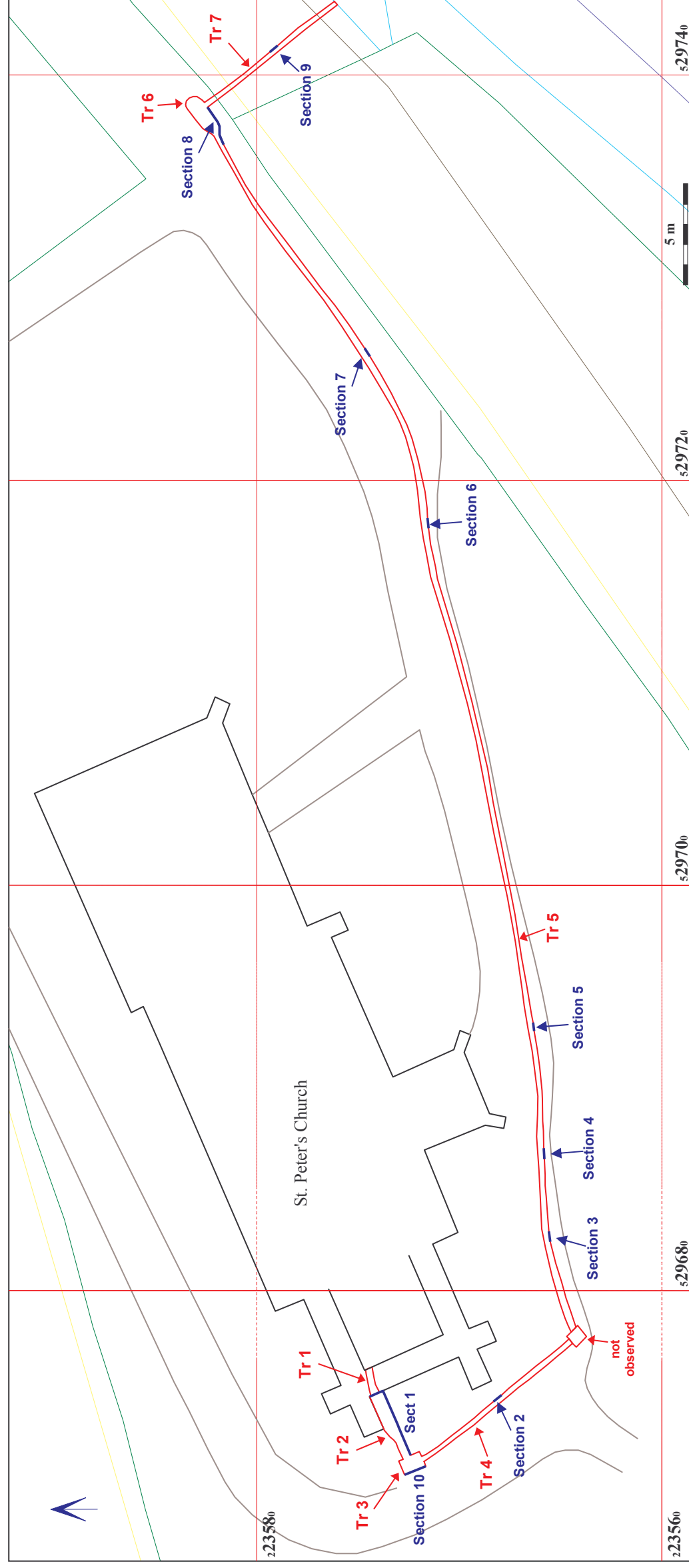


Figure 1: Site location map
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