

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

ST. ALKMUND'S CHURCH WHITCHURCH

For Buttress Architects

Ric Buckle & Rebecca Jones MA ACIfA

L~P:ARCHÆOLOGY

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

ST. ALKMUND'S CHURCH WHITCHURCH

Client: Buttress Architects

Local Authority: Shropshire Council

NGR: 354105,341705

Planning App: 16/02899/FUL

Author(s): R. Buckle & R. Jones

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Abstract

An archaeological Watching Brief was carried out during groundworks at St. Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch, Shropshire. The Watching Brief was implemented because of the potential for archaeological remains on the site. The work was carried out by Ric Buckle and Rebecca Jones of L - P : Archaeology. This report has been prepared by Ric Buckle and Rebecca Jones of L - P : Archaeology on behalf of Buttress Architects.

The Roman period is well represented throughout Whitchurch and the development site lies in a potential area for Roman settlement deposits. Whitchurch, identified as Mediolanum in the Antonine Itinerary, was a town which lay on a major route-way between Deva (Chester) and Viroconium Cornoviorum (Wroxeter).

Whitchurch is noted in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as Westune/ tone, the Medieval period is well represented in the historic core of the town, with the Medieval market cited to have had its first charter in 1190.

The Parish church of Saint Alkmund was constructed between 1712-1713 by John Barker and William Smith. The building is of red sandstone ashlar with some details in grey sandstone ashlar. Many features of the church have been altered or repaired throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The objectives of the Watching Brief were to observe, identify, characterise and record any archaeological remains with a specific aim to record any remains relating to the Roman and Post Medieval activity on the site.

The archaeological Watching Brief did not encounter any archaeological features or any sealed deposits. The assemblage of finds indicates major disturbance of the area most recently from service cables leading to a new exterior lighting system. The trench was abutting the wall of the church, which has been subject to rebuilding/restructuring.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report details the results of an archaeological Watching Brief carried out in the grounds of St. Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch, Shropshire for Buttress Architects. The local authority is Shropshire Council.
- 1.2. Planning permission has been granted for the erection of a disabled access ramp (hereafter 'the ramp') to the main entrance of the church (16/02899/FUL). As a condition of the planning consent an archaeological Watching Brief was required on groundworks associated with the development.
- 1.3. The fieldwork was carried out by Ric Buckle and Rebecca Jones of L - P : Archaeology between during May 2017. This report has been written by Ric Buckle and Rebecca Jones of L - P : Archaeology.
- 1.4. The site is located within the grounds of St. Alkmund's Church, centred on national grid reference (NGR) 354105,341705.
- 1.5. The site code allocated by L - P : Archaeology is LP2346C.
- 1.6. The work was carried out in accordance with a written specification (WSI) prepared by Benjamin Sleep of L - P : Archaeology (SLEEP 2016).

2. Site Background

2.1.PLANNING

- 2.1.1. In March 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government issued the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (DCLG 2012). This document sets out planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment and replaces all previous Planning Policy Guidance, specifically PPS5. Section 12 of this document sets out planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment.
- 2.1.2. The NPPF indicates planning decisions should be made based on the significance of Heritage Assets. These are defined as buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions.
- 2.1.3. In considering any planning application for development the Local Planning Authority is Shropshire Council, who take advice from Shropshire Council Archaeology.
- 2.1.4. Planning consent has been granted by Shropshire Council for construction of permanent ramp access to the church, application no. 16/02899/FUL. Condition 3 of the planning conditions attached to the development states:
- No development approved by this permission shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI). This written scheme shall be approved in writing by the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works.
- Reason: The site is known to hold archaeological interest.
- 2.1.5. Buttress Architects and Shropshire Council have agreed the methodology for these works in the WSI (SLEEP 2016).
- 2.1.6. This document seeks to satisfy the condition by describing the results of the watching brief and clarifying the status and location of the project archive.

2.2.GEOLOGY

2.2.1. The bedrock geology is thought to be Halite stone and Mudstone of the Wilkesley Halite Member. The drift deposits are thought to be glaciofluvial deposits of Devensian sand and gravels (BRITISH GEOLOGICAL SURVEY 2017).

2.3.TOPOGRAPHY

2.3.1. The church is situated on a slight rise, elevated above the surrounding town of Whitchurch, at around 104m OD. To the north extends the graveyard, to the east lie the residential properties which front onto Claypit street, to the south the site is bounded by Church Street and to the west by the three way junction of Church Street, Yardington and Bargates.

2.4.ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

2.4.1. This section outlines a brief summary of the historic development of the site, containing research carried out by L - P : Archaeology from Historic England's database, local sources and bibliographic texts.

PREHISTORIC

2.4.2. The prehistoric periods are not well attested, a single findspot in Whitchurch itself records a perforated stone adze having been recovered from Edgeley Road (MON. REF: 71003), in the wider area around Whitchurch a findspot of a stone axe and mace-head was recorded at Dearnford Hall (MON. REF: 70865) and a single flint flake has been recorded northwest of Whitchurch (MON. REF: 71029).

2.4.3. No finds or features attesting to the Prehistoric periods have been recorded within the site or it's immediate surroundings.

ROMAN

2.4.4. The Roman period is well represented throughout Whitchurch and the development site lies in a potential area for Roman settlement deposits.

2.4.5. Whitchurch identified as Mediolanum in the Antonine Itinerary (JONES & WEBSTER 1968) was a town which lay on a major route-way between Deva (Chester) and Viroconium Cornoviorum (Wroxeter) (MON. REF: SJ54 SW3).

Mediolanum is a Gallo-Brittonic place-name and means "the central plain" (RIVET 1970: 77).

- 2.4.6. Initially developed as a fort around AD52, the military moved on and the *vicus* began to thrive as a town, being established as such by AD133. The primary settlement consisted of timber-framed buildings, but as the town reached prosperity in the early 3rd century redevelopment in stone took place (MON. REF: SJ54 SW3).
- 2.4.7. In 1950, c.200m north of the site, the remains of an old road surface were recorded 2' 6" below ground level (MON. REF: 70988) the remains are considered to follow the alignment of Dr M Gelling's RR6a, a portion of road running from Whitchurch to Peover (MON. REF: 1325958), also alluded to as 'Watling Street West' (LAFLIN 2015: 20). Adjacent to this, now known as London Road, is a suspected Roman cemetery (HER: 05918).
- 2.4.8. Excavations at Bollandsfield, Tarpoley Road, revealed Roman settlement features (WILSON PARRY 2015). Within a 1km radius of the development site 3 Roman coins have been recorded at Doddington, Whitchurch (MON. REF: 71027), excavations on Heath Road revealed a Roman occupation site (MON. REF: 70838) and evaluations by L - P : Archaeology at 11-11a High Street revealed a Roman ditch (STATTER 2006A & STATTER 2006B).

EARLY MEDIEVAL

- 2.4.9. It has been suggested that the dedication of the church to St Alkmund indicates an Anglo-Saxon foundation although the church is not mentioned at Domesday (DUGGAN 1935: 53). There is, at present, no evidence of a Medieval settlement in Whitchurch prior to the 11th century.

MEDIEVAL

- 2.4.10. Whitchurch is noted in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as Westune/stone and under the lordship of William of Warenne. Whitchurch was a large settlement of 41 households, with 23 villagers, 9 smallholders, 2 slaves and 7 others with enough woodland for 400 pigs (WILLIAMS & MARTIN 2003). The first recorded use of 'Whitchurch' is in 1271-2 (GELLING 1990: 311). The Medieval period is

well represented in the historic core of the town. The medieval market was cited to have its first charter in 1190, however this is recorded in a 13th Century document (JAMES 1989). In 1199 Whitchurch is listed as 'Album Monastarium' (MON. REF: 1300084), the name likely refers to a new stone church than a white church (EKWALL 1985: 513), and references to a castle in Whitchurch arise at the same date (HER 00904). It is recorded that the castle, along with most of the town, was destroyed by Owain Glyndwr in 1404, the castle gates, however surviving until the construction of the Natwest Bank (MON. REF: 71000).

POST MEDIEVAL

2.4.11. The following background information is summarised from the Listed Building information for the Church of Saint Alkmund (LIST NO.1177510) held on the Historic England List (HISTORIC ENGLAND 2017):

2.4.12. The Parish church of Saint Alkmund was constructed between 1712-1713 by John Barker and William Smith. It was restored from 1877-1879 and 1885-1886. The building was internally altered in 1894 and 1900-1902. The southern porch was rebuilt in 1925.

2.4.13. The building is of red sandstone ashlar with some details in grey sandstone ashlar. Many features of the church have been altered or repaired throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

2.4.14. A commemorative tablet at the entrance to the church gives reference to an earlier building. Inscribed with:

Beneath the Stone in this Porch rests the embalmed heart of John Talbot 1st Earl of Salop who for 24 years fought his Country's battles against the french and was slain at the battle of Bordeaux A.D. 1453.

When lying wounded on the field he charged his faithful guard of Whitchurch men that in memory of their courage and devotion, his body should be buried in the porch of their Church that as they had fought and strode over it while living so should they and their children forever pass over it and guard it when dead.

The original Stone which was destroyed by the falling of the Old Church A.D. 1711 was replaced and this Tablet erected by the men of Whitchurch A.D. 1873.

2.5.SITE CONDITIONS

2.5.1. The area proposed for redevelopment is immediately adjacent and east of the southern porch of the church. This is currently a tarmacked footpath, with historic stone guttering running along the base of the main church building and turning south, between the southern porch and the footpath.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1. The general aims of the archaeological Watching Brief were to record the character, date, type, state of preservation, and extent of any archaeological remains on site exposed or disturbed during groundworks.

3.2. The specific aims of the archaeological Watching Brief were to:

- ◆ Record any remains relating to the previous phases of construction of the church, including discarded building materials or associated Post Medieval remains, particularly if they retain mason's marks;
- ◆ To record the presence or absence of any previous phases of occupation;
- ◆ To assess the presence or absence of any human remains; and
- ◆ To record any remains of earlier archaeological periods, particularly the Medieval and Roman.

4. Methodology

- 4.1. For a full description of the archaeological methodology please refer to section 4 of the WSI (SLEEP 2016).
- 4.2. The total area of the proposed development of the access ramp is 26m² and is almost rectangular in shape. All groundworks associated with the proposed development (FIGURE 2) were archaeologically monitored.
- 4.3. All excavations were undertaken by the clients groundwork contractor utilising suitable plant, in this case a small, tracked 360° machine with toothless ditching bucket.
- 4.4. A qualified and experienced archaeologist monitored these excavation activities to ensure that appropriate care was taken. Undifferentiated topsoil and overburden of recent origin was removed in successive spits no greater than 0.10m in depth until required ground level was reached.
- 4.5. All plan and section surfaces were examined for archaeological deposits and features, with each deposit being allocated a three digit identifier (context number) and recorded on standard L - P : Archaeology recording sheets. Digital photography played an integral part in the recording of this site with general shots taken to show wider site context.
- 4.6. All works were carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct as set out by the Cifa (CIFA 2014A) and Cifa's Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (CIFA 2014B).

5. Results

- 5.1. Results are detailed below by phase of groundworks. Not all context numbers referred to in the text are illustrated, but all are in the archive. Deposit numbers are given in (parentheses) with structure numbers given in [square brackets].
- 5.2. The watching brief was undertaken in two phases. The first phase involved the excavation of two parallel, east to west, foundation trenches approximately 5 metres in length. Initially excavated to approximately 0.50m in depth, ground conditions were investigated and deemed insufficient. Further excavations to a depth of approximately 0.90m was still not deemed sufficiently stable and a different approach was necessary. On the architects advice the remaining baulk between the initial two trenches was excavated, linking both trenches to create an open space for the purpose of creating a concrete raft. The trench was excavated to approximately 2.5m wide x 5m long to a maximum depth of 0.90m.
- 5.3. The second phase comprised the lifting and re-setting of the porch slabs in order to raise the height of the entrance to match the new ramp. This included the lifting of the central marble slab which had been laid by the 'men of Whitchurch A.D. 1873'.

5.4. PHASE 1

- 5.4.1. On excavation of the initial phase of work the flagstone path was lifted, exposing a 0.1m thick compact gravel deposit, (100), that had been used as a levelling layer.
- 5.4.2. Deposit (101) was located beneath (100) and comprised a soft dark grey silty built-up layer containing an assemblage of mixed finds (PLATE 1), including fragments of disarticulated human bone which were returned to the church. The assemblage was predominantly ceramic, including five sherds of residual Roman pottery, including amphora dated to the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, South Gaulish Samian, dated to AD70-110 and two sherds of local orangeware. The assemblage also included Post Medieval pottery and clay tobacco pipe dating from the 17th to 19th centuries AD.
- 5.4.3. Context (101) appeared to have been heavily disturbed, attested by the mixed dates of the finds assemblage, possibly from alteration/landscaping in the 19th

century and with recent developments. As excavation deepened to find firmer ground no other distinct deposits were encountered. Excavation was carried out to a maximum depth of 0.90m before a new plan for the footings meant that the concrete raft would be more practical.



Plate 1 - Shot of trench excavation, showing southeast facing section of narrow excavation, looking north with 1m scale

5.4.4. The ensuing excavation revealed that deposit (101) was greater than 0.90m thick and extended beyond the limits of excavation (PLATE 2).



Plate 2 - South-east facing section of ground reduction for ramp, with 1m scale

5.5.PHASE 2

5.5.1. The second phase of work was required in order to raise the level of the entrance porch meet the level of the new concrete ramp

5.5.2. The entrance is made of sandstone flagstones and a central marble slab bonded with cement (102). A Stihl saw was used to cut through the cement and loosen the flagstones (PLATE 3).



Plate 3 - Working shot of Stihl saw being used to cut the mortar



Plate 4 - East facing section of flagstones below porch columns, with 1m scale



Plate 5 - Shot of concrete base below flagstones

5.5.3. The 50mm thick flagstones were removed to reveal a solid concrete foundation (PLATES 4 & 5). No further excavation was necessary as the concrete foundation provided enough stability to raise the height of the entrance.

6. Finds

BY DAN GARNER BA FSA MCIFA

6.1. A small assemblage of artefacts were recovered from the watching brief. The objects recovered are summarised below:

6.2.POTTERY

6.2.1. Seven sherds of pottery weighing 781 grams were recovered from context (101) within the watching brief; these have been catalogued on an xl.spreadsheet and will form part of the site archive. There were no groups worthy of more than basic quantification and the primary function of the material was to inform the dating for the structural narrative.

6.2.2. All of the catalogued pottery was recovered from context (101). The latest material in the assemblage consisted of a base sherd from a 'Mocha ware' vessel of late 18th or 19th century date. The only other post-medieval pottery present in the assemblage was a base sherd from a slipware dish dated c. 17th/18th century.

6.2.3. Context (101) also contained a quantity of residual Roman pottery. This included a handle sherd from a Dressel 20 amphora (BAT AM 1); generally dated to the 2nd to 4th century AD and used to transport olive oil from southern Spain. There were also two undecorated sherds of South Gaulish Samian ware (LGF SA) including: a base to a Drag. 27 cup; and a rim to a Drag.37 bowl. This ware is generally dated c.AD 70-110.

6.2.4. The assemblage also contained two sherds of local orangeware including a large base sherd (HOL OX) to a jar and a body sherd with an external white slip (HOL WS).

6.3.CLAY TOBACCO PIPE

6.3.1. Three stem fragments of clay tobacco pipe weighing 10 grams were recovered from context (101). None of the fragments were marked or showed signs of modification. The bore diameters would suggest the pipe fragments were of 18th century date.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

- 7.1. An archaeological Watching Brief carried out in the grounds of St. Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch, Shropshire for Buttress Architects.
- 7.2. Planning permission has been granted for the erection of a disabled access ramp (hereafter 'the ramp') to the main entrance of the church (16/02899/FUL). As a condition of the planning consent an archaeological Watching Brief was required on groundworks associated with the development.
- 7.3. The archaeological Watching Brief did not encounter any archaeological features or any sealed deposits. The assemblage of Roman and Post Medieval finds attests to the disturbance of the site, most recently from service cables leading to a new exterior lighting system. The trench was abutting the wall of the church, which are known to have undergone major rebuilding/restructuring in the 19th century, which may have also contributed to the mixed nature of (101).
- 7.4. The presence of residual Roman finds is of interest, given that the foundations of Whitchurch lie within the Roman period. The church sits at the highest point of the town and would have been an optimal location for Roman occupation. The inclusion of the Roman pottery within (101) likely means that earlier Roman deposits were disturbed during the construction and renovation of the church.
- 7.5. Given the limited nature of the groundworks it was not possible to ascertain the depth of the churches foundations or the depth of further Post Medieval disturbance and whether these would have entirely removed the potential Roman deposits.

8. Archive

8.1. The paper archive consists of:

- ◆ 1 x Watching Brief Daily Record Sheets
- ◆ 1 x Context Register
- ◆ 3 x Context sheets
- ◆ 1 x Photographic Register

8.2. The finds archive consists of:

- ◆ 1 x box artefacts as described in Section 6 (all materials).

8.3. The archive is to be deposited with the Shropshire Museums Service.

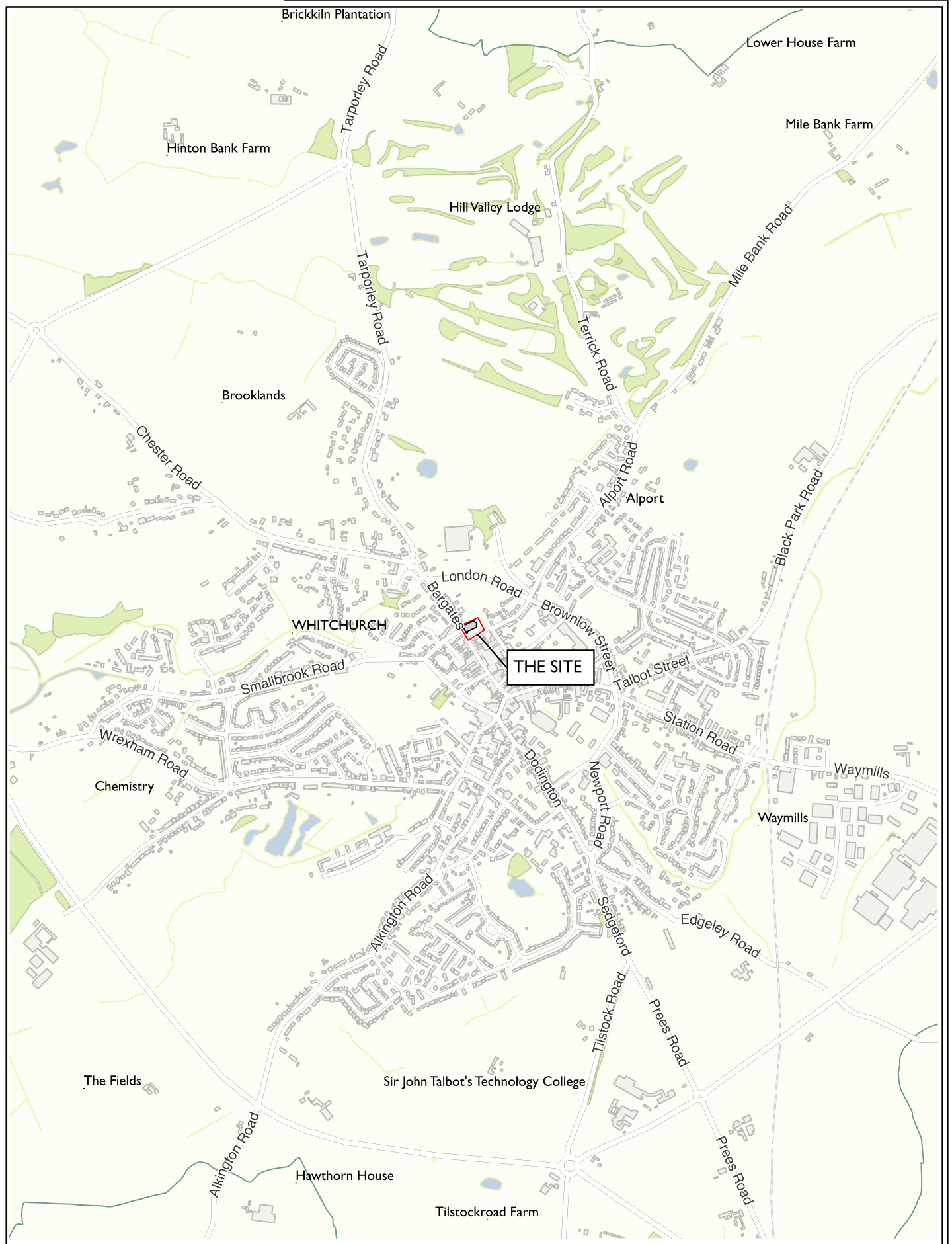
SOURCES CONSULTED

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FIGURES

FIGURE 1 // Site Location - General



0 500 m



PROJECT // 2346C - St Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch

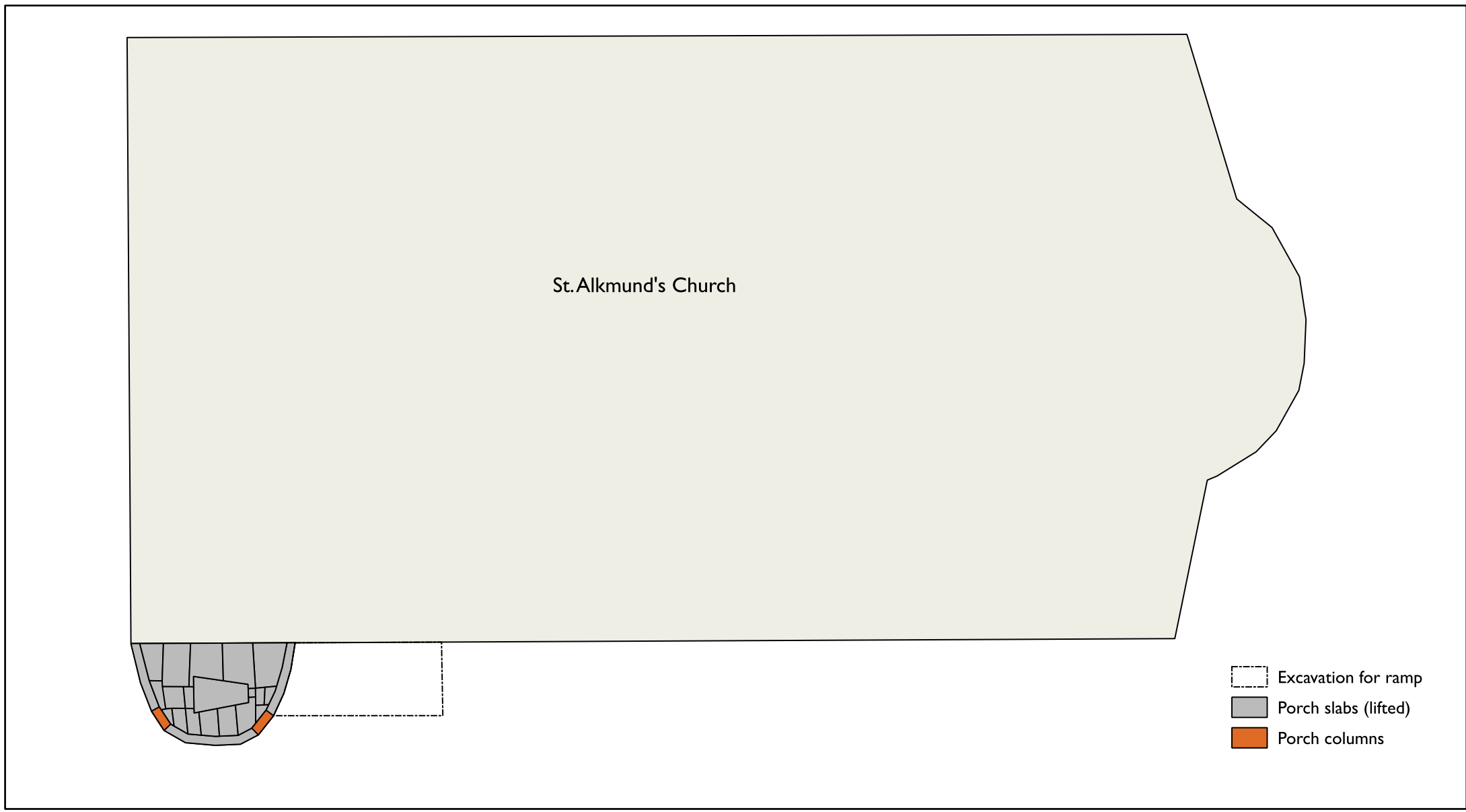
DESCRIPTION // Site Location

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FIGURE 2 // Site Plan



0 10 m



PROJECT // 2346C - St Alkmund's Church,Whitchurch

DESCRIPTION // Site Plan

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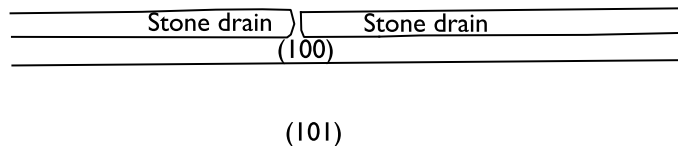
DOC REF: LP2346C-WBR-v1

L-P:ARCHAEOLOGY

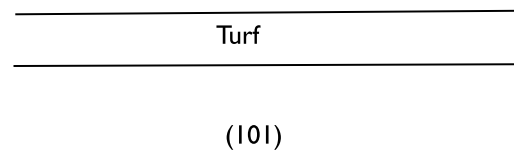
South/south-east facing section of porch flagstones



South/south-east facing section of ramp trench



North/northwest facing section of ramp trench



PROJECT // 2346C - St Alkmund's Church,Whitchurch

DESCRIPTION // Sections

DOC REF: LP2346C-WBR-v1

OASIS FORM

APPENDIX I

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: Iparchae1-290725

Project details

Project name	Archaeological Watching Brief: St. Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch
Short description of the project	An archaeological watching brief was carried out during groundworks at St. Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch, Shropshire. The Watching Brief was implemented because of the potential for archaeological remains on the site. The work was carried out by Ric Buckle of L - P : Archaeology. This report has been prepared by Ric Buckle and Rebecca Jones of L - P : Archaeology on behalf of Buttress Architects. The Roman period is well represented throughout Whitchurch and the development site lies in a potential area for roman settlement deposits. Whitchurch identified as the Mediolanum in the Antonine Itinerary was a town which lay on a major route-way between Deva Vitrix (Chester) and Viroconium Cornoviorum (Wroxeter). Whitchurch is noted in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as Westune/tone, the medieval period is well represented in the historic core of the town, with the medieval market cited to have had its first charter in 1190. The Parish church of Saint Alkmund was constructed between 1712-1713 by John Barker and William Smith. The building is of red sandstone ashlar with some details in grey sandstone ashlar. Many features of the church have been altered or repaired throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The objectives of the Watching Brief were to observe, identify, characterise and record any archaeological remains with a specific aim to record any remains relating to the Roman and Post Medieval activity on the site. The archaeological watching brief did not encounter any archaeological features or any sealed deposits. The assemblage of finds indicates major disturbance of the area most recently from service cables leading to a new exterior lighting system. The trench was abutting the wall of the church, which have been subject to rebuilding/restructuring.
Project dates	Start: 01-05-2017 End: 31-07-2017
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	LP2346C - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	NA None
Significant Finds	POTTERY Roman
Significant Finds	CLAY PIPE Post Medieval

Investigation type "Watching Brief"
 Prompt Listed Building Consent

Project location

Country England
 Site location SHROPSHIRE NORTH SHROPSHIRE WHITCHURCH URBAN St. Alkmund's Church, Whitchurch
 Postcode SY13 1LB
 Study area 16 Square metres
 Site coordinates SJ 54100 41702 52.970395552584 -2.6835508064 52 58 13 N 002 41 00 W Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation L - P : Archaeology
 Project brief originator Buttress Architects
 Project design originator L - P : Archaeology
 Project director/manager Blair Poole
 Project supervisor Ric Buckle
 Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Shropshire Museum Service
 Physical Contents "Ceramics"
 Digital Archive recipient Shropshire Museum Service
 Digital Contents "none"
 Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography"
 Paper Archive recipient Shropshire Museum Service
 Paper Contents "none"
 Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Drawing", "Photograph", "Report"

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