



**Northamptonshire  
County Council**

## Northamptonshire Archaeology

**An archaeological watching brief  
at the Church of St Catherine, Burbage**

**Leicestershire**

**April - May 2005**



David J. Leigh

January 2006

Report 05/142

**Northamptonshire Archaeology**

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**QUALITY CONTROL**

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project name	An archaeological watching brief at The Church of St Catherine, Burbage, Leicestershire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants during the dismantling of the north wall of The Church of St Catherine, and the excavation of foundation pits and ring beam for a new extension to the north aisle of the church. A number of burials of 19 <sup>th</sup> century and later date were encountered, these were recorded and exhumed archaeologically for re-burial within the cemetery. Two brick lined graves were also revealed. These were recorded and backfilled with clean dry sand prior to being sealed by the new foundations.	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Watching Brief,	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	Parish Church	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	Desk-based assessment (Morris 2000) and Trial excavation (Haywood 2002)	
Current Land use	Ecclesiastical, Parish Church	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	13 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup> century Parish Church	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address (including postcode)	The Church of St Catherine, Burbage, Leicestershire	
Study area (sq.m or ha)		
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. numbers)	44425 29275	
Height OD	130m aOD	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC)	
Director/Supervisor	David J.Leigh	
Project Manager	Iain Soden	
Sponsor or funding body	JSAC	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	April 2005	
End date	May 2005	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location (Accession no.)</b>	<b>Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical		Architectural fragments (1)
Paper	Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Record Service Accession No: X.A48.2005	Watching brief forms (20) Colour slides (61) black and white contact prints (58) Digital photographs (93) Permatrace (3) Skeleton record sheets (10) Context sheets (11)
Digital	Ditto	Report text and figures

# Contents

1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
2	<b>BACKGROUND</b>
3	<b>OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY</b>
4	<b>THE RECORDED EVIDENCE</b>
5	<b>THE SITE ARCHIVE</b>
6	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>

## **Figures**

Fig 1: Site location

Fig 2: Location of groundworks

## **Plates**

Plate 1: The Church of St Catherine, Burbage

Plate 2: The north wall during dismantling

Plate 3: The windows and tracery after removal

Plate 4: Section through north wall

Plate 5: The excavation of the foundation pits

Plate 6: View of brick lined grave 1 as revealed

Plate 7: Brick lined grave 1, opening in progress

Plate 8: Brick lined grave 2

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT  
THE CHURCH OF ST CATHERINE, BURBAGE, LEICESTERSHIRE  
APRIL - MAY 2005**

*Abstract*

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants during the dismantling of the north wall of the Church of St Catherine, Burbage and groundworks for an extension. The work was carried out on behalf of the Parochial Church Council. A number of burials of 19<sup>th</sup> century and later date were encountered. These were recorded and exhumed archaeologically for re-burial in the cemetery. Two brick-lined graves were revealed. These were recorded, but the interments were not removed and the graves were filled with clean sand prior to being sealed by the new foundations.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology between April and May 2005 at The Church of St Catherine, Burbage, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 4425 9275; Fig 1; Plate 1). This took place during the dismantling of the north wall of the church and the excavation of foundation pits and ring beams for the construction of a new extension to the north aisle of the church, in order to accommodate an ever increasing congregation. The archaeological work was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council in order to fulfil the requirements of a specification for an archaeological watching brief agreed with the Archaeological Advisor to the Leicester Diocesan Advisory Committee.

**2 BACKGROUND**

**2.1 Location and Topography**

The Church of St Catherine is located within the village of Burbage and lies on level ground at a height of 130m aOD. The underlying geology has been mapped by the British Geological Survey as Reddish Till.

## 2.2 Historical Background

The Church stands, just over a mile to the north of Roman Watling Street and three miles to the west of Fosse Way Roman Road. There is little evidence for later prehistoric or Roman activity in the vicinity of the church and it may be that the Burbage area was sparsely inhabited then.

Burbage is first recorded in two charters of 1043. In that year Leofric of Chester founded Coventry Abbey and granted land in Burbage to it. King Edward also granted land there to Coventry Abbey in 1043 (Sawyer 1968: 1000, 1226). No church is recorded here in the Domesday survey of 1086, but there was a church by the early 13<sup>th</sup> century (Morris 2000). The present church appears to be on the site of the 13<sup>th</sup> century church. The west tower dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century but the remainder of the church building was extensively re-built by Habershon in 1842 (Morris 2000). Prior to the present phase of work it was unclear whether, when this was carried out, the church was re-built on its original footings, or if medieval fabric was refaced (Morris, 2000).

Previous archaeological work comprised a desk-based assessment and an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of JSAC as part of the present application (Morris 2000; Haywood 2002). The evaluation involved the excavation of five hand-excavated trial trenches which confirmed the presence of post-medieval or recent burials at c0.9m below modern ground surface.

## 3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The aims of the present watching brief were to:

- ◆ Observe the dismantling of the north wall of the church, and to record any evidence of the pre-1842 church or any archaeological deposits.
- ◆ Observe the excavation of the foundation pits and the ring beams, and to record any archaeological deposits present.
- ◆ To record and lift archaeologically any human remains encountered during the course of the groundworks.
- ◆ Determine the date, character, state of preservation and depth of any archaeological deposits observed and to retrieve all datable artefacts.

The fieldwork comprised sixteen visits to the site during the dismantling of the north wall and the excavation of foundation pits and ring beams (Fig 2). The groundworks were carried out using a tracked 360° mini-digger under archaeological supervision with additional hand digging as required. A photographic record in both black and white negative and colour slide was kept,

along with supplementary photographs in digital format. The written record employed Northamptonshire Archaeology pro-forma sheets. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the standards and guidelines for an archaeological watching brief (IFA 1999).

## **4 THE RECORDED EVIDENCE**

### **4.1 The north wall**

The north wall of the church was dismantled using a combination of hand tools and power-chisels (Plate 2). The existing windows and tracery were carefully removed and marked in order to allow re-assembly within the wall of the new extension (Plate 3). A photographic record was made of the wall prior to the start of work and during dismantling.

The wall construction comprised an inner face of red brick of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, bonded with a compact, grey white mortar. The outer face comprised saw-cut limestone blocks bonded with mortar similar to that used in the inner brick face. The cavity between the inner and outer faces was filled with a loose rubble and pink/red mortar mix. The overall thickness of the wall was 1.1m (Plate 4). To provide additional stability to the wall the original builders had tied both wall faces together by means of bridging stones, these comprised both un-worked stones and architectural fragments. The architectural fragments showed no evidence of wear or weathering and would appear to be unused fragments from the 1842 re-build; a fragment was retained for the archive.

The north wall was dismantled down to 0.75m below present ground level, and the wall foundations continued below this depth. No evidence of masonry connected with the pre-1842 church, or any earlier archaeological deposits were revealed either within the foundations or within the fabric of the wall.

### **4.2 The foundations**

Groundworks for the foundations of the new extension began with the excavation of ten pits for load-bearing pillars (Fig 2 & plate 5). These measured 1m x 1m and were mechanically excavated to a depth of 0.9m below present ground level when the level of burials identified during the evaluation was reached. Hand digging was thereafter employed to excavate the remainder of the pits to a maximum depth of 1.50m, the level at which the lowest burials were encountered. Further mechanical excavation took place after the removal of the burials to increase the depth to formation level.

A similar stratigraphic sequence was common to all the pits. This comprised clean orange/red sand substratum, overlain by grey/brown demolition/levelling material up to 0.75m thick containing numerous fragments of 19<sup>th</sup> century and later ceramic building material. This in turn was sealed by grey/brown topsoil, up to 0.15m thick.

Ten burials were recorded, all of which had been in coffins, along with eight grave cuts in the sections of several pits which were not excavated since they remain unaffected by the foundations. All the burials encountered were cut into the natural substratum. Little or nothing remained of the coffins apart from nails and in two cases coffin furniture. The coffin furniture may be dated stylistically to that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Three burials contained remains that were not fully skeletonised and appear to have been of relatively recent date.

Once recorded, the bones of each burial were placed into a 'Tyvex' woven bag for re-burial as close as possible to the area in which it was originally interred at a depth beyond further disturbance by the building works.

Once the foundation pits were concreted the ring beam was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.88m below present ground level. During the course of this work two-brick lined graves were identified (Fig 2). These were opened and a photographic record was made.

#### **4.1 Brick-lined grave 1 (Plates 6 & 7)**

This was constructed of red brick bonded with hard grey/white mortar. It measured 2.20m in length with an outside width of 1.73m. The walls were of double brick thickness with a vaulted roof, again in red brick. Within the grave an adult male skeleton lay within the remains of a wooden coffin, with coffin furniture of typically 19<sup>th</sup> century date. It was not possible to ascertain whether further burials were interred below that exposed. Once recording was complete the grave was filled with clean dry sand in order to allow the concrete ring beam foundation to be bridged over.

#### **4.2 Brick-lined grave 2 (Plate 8)**

Grave 2 was of identical construction to grave 1. Within the grave were degraded remains of human bone and fragments of a wooden coffin. As with grave 1, the grave was filled with clean dry sand and bridged by the concrete ring beam foundation.



## 5 THE SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive comprises:

RECORD	NUMBER
Watching brief forms	20
Colour slides	61
Black and white contacts and negatives	58
Digital photographs	93
Permatrace	3
Skeleton record sheets	10
Context sheets	11
Architectural fragments	1

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

No evidence of the fabric of an earlier church was revealed either within the construction of the north wall, or within the foundations. The results of the watching brief suggest that the rebuilding of the church by Habershon in 1842 either completely removed all traces of the earlier build, or the location of the original north aisle lies within the footprint of the present church.

The results of the trial evaluation suggested a late 17<sup>th</sup> century date for the earliest burials in this area of the cemetery, however as a result of the more extensive investigation allowed during the course of the watching brief a 19<sup>th</sup> century date for the initial burials may be proposed.

All the burials recorded and exhumed during the course of the watching brief have now been re-buried close to the original burial location. The watching brief was carried out in favourable conditions and the results are considered to be reliable.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

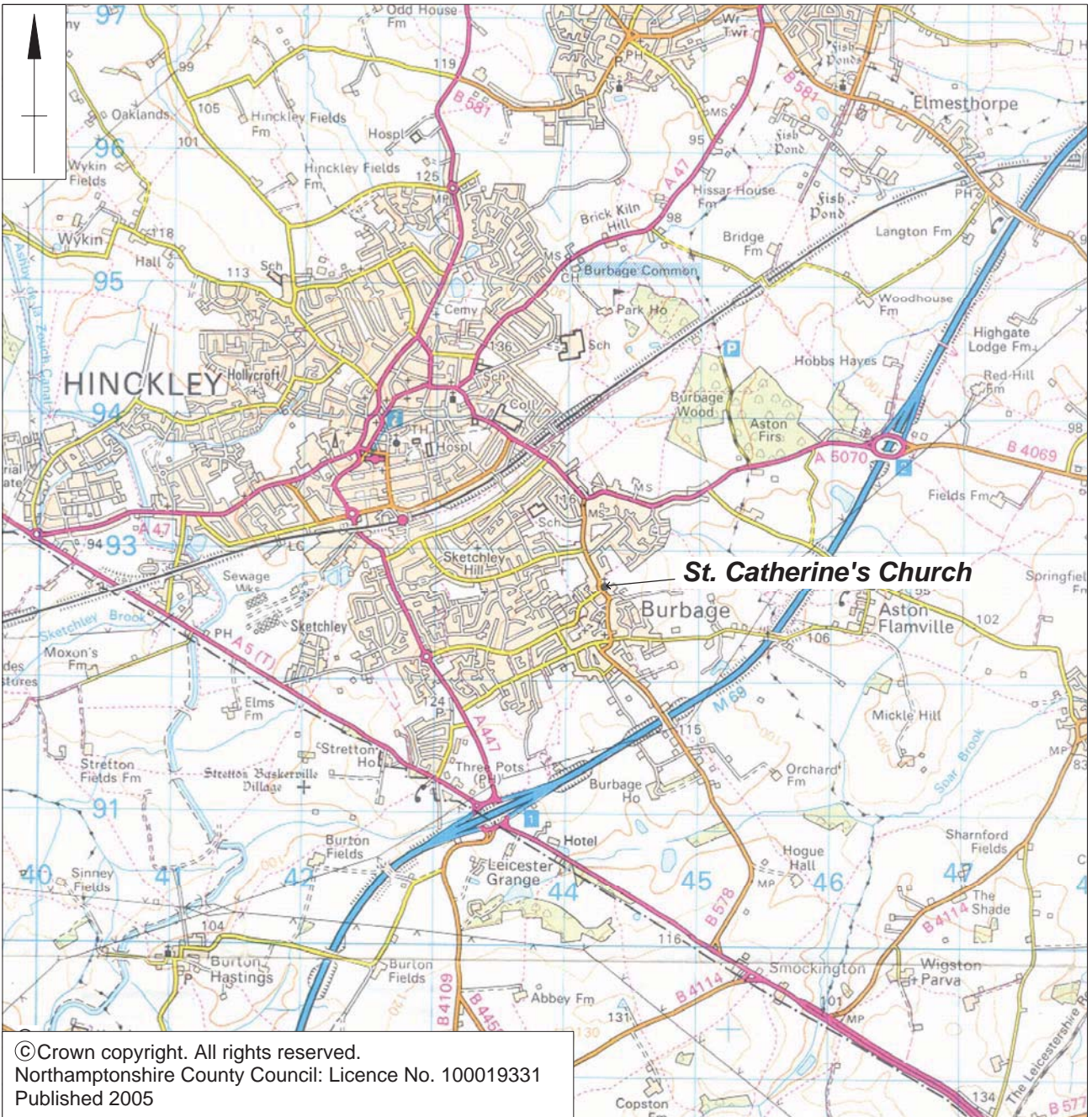
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Scale = 1:50,000

Fig. 1

# Foundation Layout - St Catherines Church, Burbage

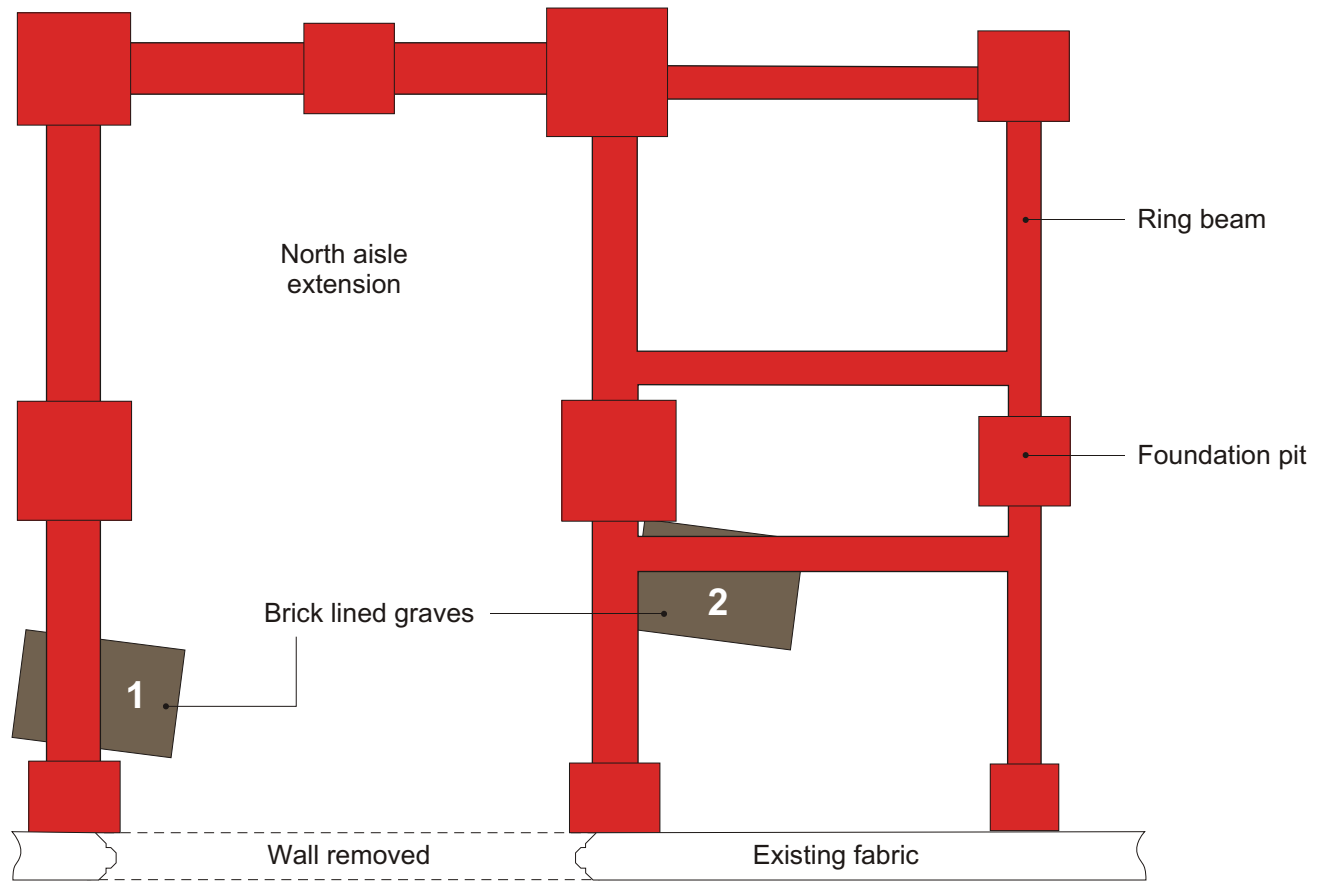


Fig 2





Plate 1: The Church of St Catherine, Burbage, from the south





Plate 2: The north wall during dismantling



Plate 3: The windows and tracery after removal





Plate 4: Section through north wall





Plate 5: The excavation of the foundation pits



Plate 6: Brick lined grave 1, as revealed





Plate 7: Brick lined grave 1, opening in progress



Plate 8: Brick lined grave 2