

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Pilton, Barnstaple, North Devon	National Grid Reference SS 55623 34143	Number:
Subject: Archaeological monitoring and recording during replacement of electricity pylons at St. Marys Church, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon		Photo attached? YES
Planning Application no: N/A	Recipient museum: Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon	
OASIS ID: southwes1-254845	Museum Accession no: N/A	
Contractor's reference number/code: PSM16	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 10 th -19 th August 2016	
<p>Description of works.</p> <p>Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken by South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) at the request of Nigel Reed of Western Power Distribution (the Developer) on behalf of W. Sanders, Churchwarden at St. Mary's Church for the diocese of Exeter (the Client) during groundworks associated with the replacement of electricity pylons at St. Marys Church, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon. The monitoring was carried out by P. Webb between 10th and 19th August 2016. This report follows on from previous archaeological recording carried out at the church by SWARCH in 2015. The archaeological monitoring and recording carried out by SWARCH in 2015 related to the phases of repair of the churchyard walls, and revealed 16th-19th century materials.</p> <p>St. Marys Church is located within the core of the medieval settlement of Pilton, now a suburb on the northern edge of Barnstaple in North Devon. The settlement sits on a shallow ridge running back from the estuary of the River Taw, bounded on the south-east by the River Yeo and to the north-west by Bradiford Water. The church itself sits on a south-facing slope at a height of approximately 21m AOD. The soils of the area are the well-drained fine loamy soils of Denbigh 2 Association (SSEW 1983) overlying mudstone of the Pilton Mudstone Formation (BGS 2015).</p> <p>Pilton is an early medieval settlement – one of the four original burhs in Devon – and the church sits on the edge of a large oval enclosure (the burgh?) and on part of the site of a priory. Excavations carried out in the early 1970s (Miles and Miles 1972) north-east of the church identified several phases of buildings related to the early occupation of Pilton, potentially dating back as far as the 7th century AD. The Benedictine Priory was founded 925-40 (HER MDV806); the present St. Marys Church is Grade I Listed (Listing 1385316) and dates to the 13th century, with 15th and 17th century repairs and alterations. Surrounding the churchyard are its 19th-20th century Grade II Listed stone rubble walls (Listing 1385320) and a number of post-medieval buildings. The former residence of the Prior (Bull House) is located adjacent to the south-west and dates to the 15th century; it is also Grade I Listed (Listing 1385078).</p> <p>The groundworks comprised the removal of a segment of wall surrounding an existing pylon and subsequent augering of a new post-hole (Area #3); and the machine augering of a new post-hole within the churchyard (Area #4) for the erection of two new electricity pylons under archaeological supervision. Both areas were located towards the south-eastern churchyard boundary. The stratigraphy of the site comprised a layer of dark brown friable silt with heavy root intrusions c.0.20m thick overlying a dark brown friable silt topsoil c.0.10m thick and accumulated layers and levelling deposits comprised of greyish-brown silts with shillet inclusions up to 1.51m in thickness, overlying natural shillet/slatestone bedrock.</p> <p>Area #3, located towards the easternmost point of the south-east churchyard boundary, saw the removal of a stretch of wall c.1.5m wide either side of an existing electricity pylon set within the boundary wall; this revealed a cross-section through the deposits that had built up behind the wall. These deposits comprised silt layers (032) to (034) overlying weathered natural shillet (035) and shillet/slatestone bedrock (036). The wall removal identified the wall cut [038], filled by (039) brown friable silt, and {037} the slatestone lime-mortar bonded churchyard retaining wall. This feature may have been associated with the original construction of the wall, though later repair and replacement of this section of wall have compromised its integrity. The majority of the finds from the site came from the collapsed soils behind this section of wall.</p> <p>Area #4, located within the churchyard, mid-way along the south-eastern boundary, comprised the machine augering of a 0.4m diameter post-hole to a depth of c.2m. Due to the nature of excavation the stratigraphy and any features were not possible to identify, though it could be seen to be drilled through grave earth.</p>		

Finds

The contextual evidence from Area #3 indicates a build-up of layers predominantly during the 18th and 19th centuries, though with 15th-16th century material mixed in. The assemblage was dominated by post-medieval white refined earthenwares (11 sherds, 165g), but included 15th-16th century North Devon gravel tempered wares (1 sherd, 6g). Imports were represented by 3 sherds (58g) of Bristol/Staffordshire yellow slipware. A single clay pipe stem and heel, with 'BA RV' stamped on the heel, from 'BARUM' (Barnstaple) dating to 1680-1730 was recovered from Area 4. The unstratified material (primarily recovered from the spoil of the machine boring of Area 4) shows a similar pattern, though with increased post-medieval North Devon gravel free wares recovered.

An amount of bone was recovered, both human and animal; the human bone included several finger/toe bones.

A full list of the finds recovered is held in the site archive. The skeletal material was returned to the church.

Conclusions

The features identified during the monitoring predominantly relate to the repair of the churchyard walls. The finds suggest that the layers retained behind the churchyard walls are predominantly comprised of 18th and 19th century deposits, with 15th-16th century material mixed in.

References

- Miles, H., and Miles, T. 1975: 'Pilton, North Devon: Excavation within a Medieval Village', *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society* 33, 267-295.
- Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983: *Legend for the 1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales (a brief explanation of the constituent soil associations)*.
- British Geological Survey 2014: *Geology of Britain Viewer*.
http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html [accessed 25.08.2015]

Recorder: P. Webb

Date sent to HER: 06/09/2016

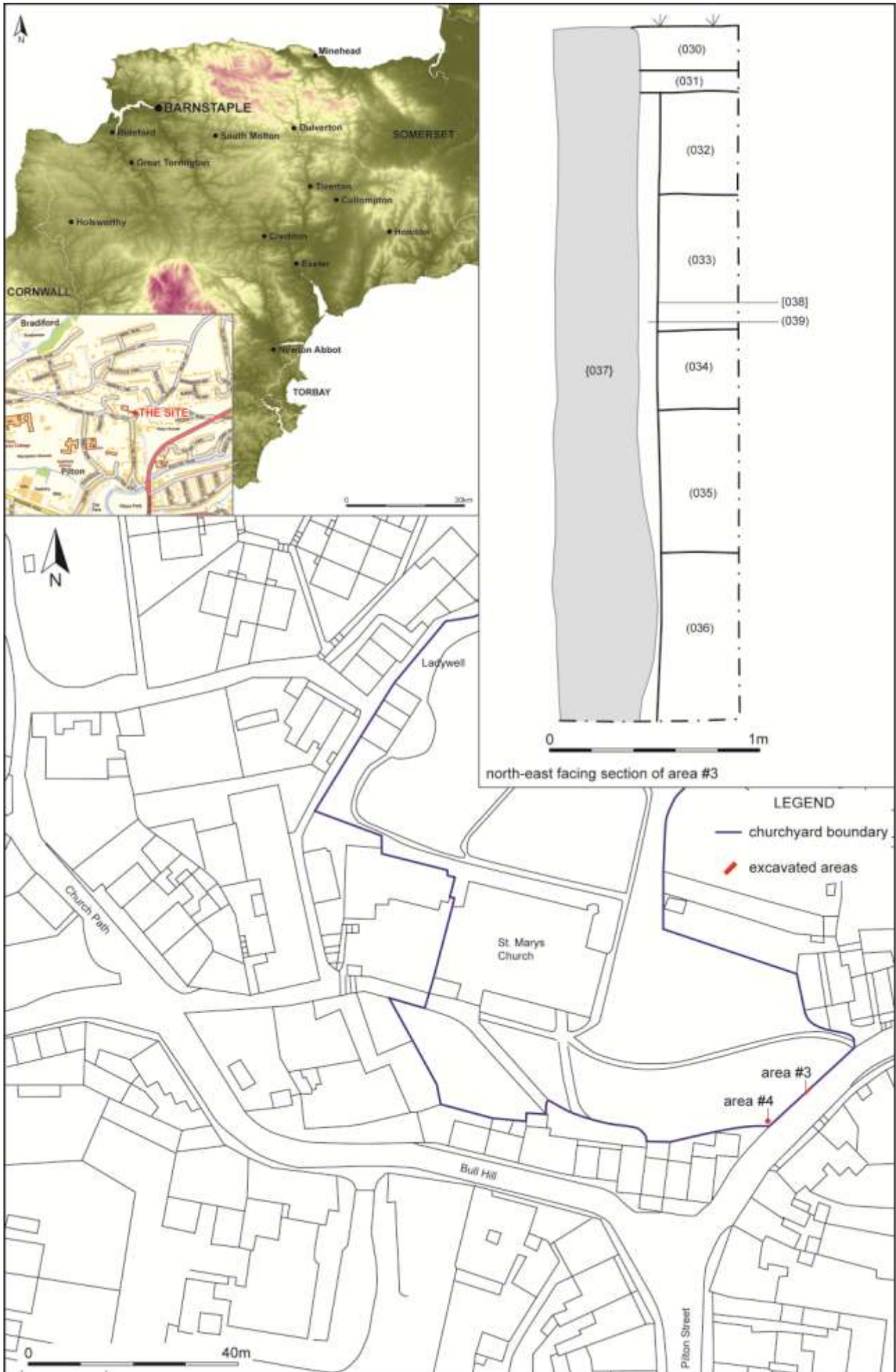


Figure 1: Site location and plan showing excavated areas.



Figure 2: North-east facing section of Area #3; viewed from the east-north-east (2m scale).



Figure 3: South-west facing section of Area #3; viewed from the west-south-west (scale 2m).



Figure 4: Post-excavation view of Area #4; viewed from the north-west (scale 1m).