

**St Mary's Church
Deerhurst
Gloucestershire**

Archaeological Works

for

Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Church, Deerhurst

CA Project: 3948
CA Report: 12344

November 2012

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SUMMARY

Project Name:	St Mary's Church
Location:	Deerhurst, Gloucestershire
NGR:	SO 8705 2996
Type:	Watching Brief
Date:	31 October- 07 November 2012
Location of Archive:	To be deposited with Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery
Accession Number:	CAGM 2012.36
Site Code:	DHC 12

A programme of archaeological works was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology during groundworks associated with the installation of a new electricity cable at St Mary's Church, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire.

Excavations in the farmyard of Priory Farm revealed six inhumations partially within the cable trench and access pit for directional drilling. Two further grave cuts and a wide post-medieval ditch were also identified. In the field to the south east of the priory buildings groundworks revealed a possible stone lining for a fishpond belonging to the Benedictine priory.



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In October and November 2012 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out a programme of archaeological works for the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St Mary's Church, Deerhurst during the installation of a new electricity supply cable to the church within the Scheduled Monument of *Deerhurst monastic site and multi-period settlement* (National Heritage List Entry Number: 1018632, centred on NGR: SO 8705 2996; Fig. 1). The archaeological works were undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to a Scheduled Monument Consent granted to The PCC. The objective of the watching brief was to investigate and record all archaeological remains exposed during the development and to ensure that the agreed installation methodology was adhered to.
- 1.2 The archaeological works were carried out in accordance with an archaeological assessment prepared by Carolyn Heighway, the archaeological consultant to the PCC, and with a subsequent detailed Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CA (2012). The fieldwork also followed the *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008), the *Statement of Standards and Practices Appropriate for Archaeological Fieldwork in Gloucestershire* (GCC 1996), the *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (English Heritage 1991) and the *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MORPHE): Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006).

The site

- 1.3 The site is located within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of *Deerhurst monastic site and multi-period settlement*. The majority of the new electricity trench lies within the farmyard and surrounding grassland of Priory Farm. St Mary's Church borders the farmyard to the west and the farmhouse at Priory Farm, partially comprising remnants of the medieval priory lie to the south (Fig. 2). The River Severn runs c.250m to the west of the site. The site lies at approximately 11.6m AOD.
- 1.4 The site is currently in use as a farmyard and surrounding open grassland.
- 1.5 The underlying solid geology of the area is mapped as Branscombe Mudstone of the Triassic era overlain by Worcester Member sand and gravel of the Quaternary

Period. Mid reddish orange and reddish pink silty sand was encountered at a depth of between 0.62m to 0.81m below present ground level in the farmyard.

Archaeological background

- 1.6 There is evidence for prehistoric and Roman finds at the church site, including two possible Roman funerary urns found beneath the church in the nineteenth century and a range of residual Roman artefacts recovered during excavations around the church in the 1970s (Rahtz 2000). St Mary's Church is likely to have been founded during the seventh or eighth centuries as a small rectangular church, possibly with a two celled porch, which forms the core of the much larger structure visible today. During the ninth and tenth centuries successive alterations and enlargements to the structure resulted in the addition of a series of porticus along the northern and southern sides of the church along with an apse at the east end and the gradual transformation of the porch into a five-storey tower (*ibid*). During the Middle Saxon period St Mary's became an important minster church, particularly noted for its sculpture and painted remains, including the 'Angel' still visible on the eastern exterior wall (Heighway 2012).
- 1.7 In the eleventh century a large residential hall complex was constructed close to the church and Odda's Chapel was erected nearby in 1056. During the medieval period St Mary's Church was incorporated into a small Benedictine priory, which butted up against the south wall of the church. During this period the area around the church and priory was extensively landscaped, including the construction of fish ponds for the priory, two of which survive as ponds in the grounds of Priory Farm and at least one more is visible as a set of earthworks. The Benedictine priory was dissolved in 1540, but St Mary's Church survived as a parish church (Heighway 2012).
- 1.8 St Mary's Church and Priory Farm have both been intensively excavated. The area of the apse at the east end of the church has been the most studied area, with excavations in this area carried out in 1926-7 (Anon 1926; Knowles 1927) and in 1971-3 (Rahtz 1976). In 2009 CA carried out excavations for flood prevention works on behalf of the Environmental Agency on fields between the church and the River Severn. Excavations in the farmyard at Priory Farm took place in 2006 as part of converting Priory Barn into holiday cottages and in 2011 during works to install a WC in the former church boiler house (Moffat 2006; 2011). In 2012 the Friends of

Deerhurst Church sponsored an excavation in the south aisle of the church (Heighway 2012).

Methodology

- 1.9 The fieldwork followed the methodology set out within the WSI (CA 2012). In the farmyard area to the east of the church, the access pit for directional drilling and a length of cable trench 9m long by 0.4m wide running west of this towards the church were excavated. The access pit measured 2m by 2m through the modern layers, however this was reduced to 1m by 2m through archaeologically sensitive layers to minimise disturbance to *in situ* archaeological remains. In the area of the cable trench that ran through previously investigated ground and in the area of the southern access pit for directional drilling an archaeologist was present during all intrusive groundworks (Fig. 2).
- 1.10 Where archaeological deposits were encountered they were planned and recorded in accordance with Technical Manual 1 *Fieldwork Recording Manual* (CA 2007). All artefacts were recovered and retained for processing and analysis in accordance with Technical Manual 3 *Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation* (CA 2010).
- 1.11 The archive and artefacts from the archaeological works are currently held by CA at their offices in Kemble. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with the Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery under accession number CAGM 2012.36, along with the site archive. A summary of information from this project, set out within Appendix C, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

2. RESULTS (FIGS 2-4)

- 2.1 This section provides an overview of the evaluation results; detailed summaries of the recorded contexts and finds are to be found in Appendices A and B respectively.
- 2.2 Six inhumations, two further grave cuts and a wide post-medieval ditch were identified in trench 1. No features were identified in trench 2, though wall 203, pertaining to the south-east porticus and recorded in the 1971-3 excavations as

AF6, was identified. Trench 3 revealed a layer of stones most likely to have been the base of a medieval fish pond. Trench 4 contained no archaeological features but did contain a subsoil layer that may have been formed as a deposit of material excavated in the construction of the nearby fish ponds.

Trench 1 (Figs 2-4)

- 2.3 Trench 1 comprised the electricity cable trench located in the area of the farmyard not previously investigated and the adjoining access pit for directional drilling. It contained the remains of six inhumations partially exposed within the trench.
- 2.4 Grave cut 107 was located at the western end of the trench and contained skeleton 106. Only the central part of the skeleton, comprising the lower portions of both left and right radius and ulnas, the pelvis, the femurs and the upper portions of the tibiae and fibulae were present within the trench.
- 2.5 Grave cut 110 was located 0.5m east of grave 107 and contained skeleton 109. The upper part of the skeleton, comprising the skull, right clavicle and both arms, was present within the trench. The central torso was not present; it is likely that this is caused by poor preservation resulting from the acidic sandy natural geology on site. Grave cut 113 was located immediately to the west of ditch 103 and contained skeleton 112. The grave was truncated by both ditch 103 and by a trench for a modern ceramic drain pipe, with the result that only the legs and feet of the skeleton were preserved.
- 2.6 Grave cut 120 was located against the northern baulk of the access pit and contained skeleton 119. The grave was badly truncated to the west by grave cut 115 and to the east by grave cut 117 and only the femurs and part of the pelvis of the skeleton remained.
- 2.7 Grave cut 123 was located directly to the south of, and was partially truncated by, grave cut 120. It contained skeleton 122, which had very poor bone preservation and only the skull and fragments of the torso were present.
- 2.8 Grave cut 126 was located in the south-east corner of the access pit and contained skeleton 125, only the skull of which was present within the trench.

- 2.9 Two further grave cuts, 115 and 117 were identified where they truncated grave 120, but these cuts were only very slightly within the trench and no skeletal remains were visible within them. A wide north/south aligned ditch, 103, was identified to the east of grave 110, cutting through the stratigraphy associated with the burial phase of activity on site. Only the upper 0.25m of the ditch was excavated as the remainder lay below the maximum 0.75m depth of the trench. From the excavated portion, the ditch was 4.9m wide with gently sloping sides. It was filled by a firm dark orange brown sandy silt containing frequent small stones. Animal bone and tile were recovered from the fill.

Trench 2 (Figs 2 & 3)

- 2.10 Trench 2 was a continuation of trench 1 to the west where it passed through previously investigated ground. Wall 203 was identified, running north/south across the trench. The foundations of the wall were exposed to a depth of 1.05m below present ground level.

Trench 3 (Figs 2)

- 2.12 Layer 301, a 0.3m thick deposit of small and medium sub-angular stones within a loose dark brown sandy silt matrix, was identified between the topsoil and the natural geological substrate in this trench. As the trench is located within the earthwork bank of a medieval fishpond it is probable that the layer represents the former base of the pond.

The finds

- 2.13 No finds were recovered pre-dating the modern period.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 Six inhumations were identified in trench 1. All were aligned east/west with their heads at the west and were lain in extended, supine positions. There was no evidence for the use of coffins or other grave furniture in the burials and no grave goods were associated with any of the interments. Although no artefacts have been recovered that would allow the burials to be dated, the layout of the graves is strongly indicative of a continuation of the graveyard identified by Rahtz in the 1971-

3 excavations against the east end of the church (Rahtz 2000). The presence of the skull of skeleton 126 at the extreme eastern end of the trench suggests that the eastern limit of the graveyard has not been reached in this excavation.

3.2 Large ditch 103 cut through the graveyard stratigraphy and appeared to be post-medieval in date. It may be related to the post-medieval ditch identified by Moffat during his 2006 evaluation for the Priory Barn holiday cottage less than 10m to the north of ditch 103.

3.3 No archaeological features pre-dating the medieval period were identified in trenches 3 and 4 in the field south-east of the priory. This is perhaps unsurprising as the field appears to have been heavily landscaped during the use of the priory for the construction of three fish ponds. Evidence was revealed in trench 3 that the northern pond may have been at least partially lined by a layer of small and medium stones.

4. CA PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken and the archive compiled by Christopher Leonard who also wrote the report. The project was managed for CA by Mark Collard.

5. REFERENCES

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Moffat, B. 2006 *Archaeological Investigations at The Barn, Deerhurst Priory: Archaeological Field Evaluation May 2006*. Pathfinders.

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APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Trench No.	Context No.	Type	Fill of	Context interpretation	Description	L (m)	W (m)	Depth / thickness (m)	Spot-date
1	100	Layer		Surface	Tarmac	10	0.4	0.07	Modern
1	101	Layer		Made ground	Hardcore and rubble underlying (100)	10	0.4	0.36	Modern
1	102	Fill	103	Fill of ditch	Firm dark orange brown sandy silt.	>0.4	4.9	>0.25	Post-medieval
1	103	Cut		Ditch	Shallow sided, N/S aligned.	>0.4	4.9	>0.25	Post-medieval
1	104	Layer		Grave fills	Undifferentiated grave fills forming layer between (101) and (127). Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt.	10	0.4	0.51	Medieval
1	105	Fill	107	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>1.05	0.44	0.64	-
1	106	Sk		Skeleton					-
1	107	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>1.05	0.44	0.64	-
1	108	Fill	110	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>1.04	>0.5	0.61	-
1	109	Sk		Skeleton					-
1	110	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>1.04	>0.5	0.61	-
1	111	Fill	113	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>1.14	0.6	0.58	-
1	112	Sk		Skeleton					-
1	113	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>1.14	0.6	0.58	-
1	114	Fill	115	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>0.3	0.4	0.82	-
1	115	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>0.3	0.4	0.82	-
1	116	Fill	117	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>0.2	>0.4	0.78	-
1	117	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>0.2	0.4	0.78	-
1	118	Fill	120	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>0.7	>0.3	0.54	-
1	119	Sk		Skeleton					-
1	120	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>0.7	>0.3	0.54	-
1	121	Fill	123	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>0.66	>0.22	0.73	-
1	122	Sk		Skeleton					-
1	123	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>0.66	>0.22	0.73	-
1	124	Fill	126	Grave fill	Loose mid brownish grey sandy silt. Same as (104).	>0.42	>0.36	0.71	-
1	125	Sk		Skeleton					-
1	126	Cut		Grave	Vertical sides, flat base.	>0.42	>0.36	0.71	-
1	127	Layer		Natural	Mid reddish orange and reddish pink silty sand.	10	0.4		-
2	200	Layer		Surface	Compacted earth	8	0.4	0.1	Modern
2	201	Layer		Made ground	Loose chippings	8	0.4	0.25	Modern
2	202	Layer		Backfill of excavation	Dark brown silty sand. Lenses of redeposited natural.	8	0.4	0.35	1973
2	203	Wall		Porticus wall		0.8	0.4	1.05	Saxon
2	204	Layer		Natural	Same as (127)	8	0.4		-
3	300	Layer		Topsoil	Loose dark brown silty sand.	9.2	0.4	0.26	Modern
3	301	Layer	302	Pond lining	Frequent stones in a loose dark brown sandy silt matrix	>9.2	>0.4	0.3	Medieval
3	302	Cut		Construction cut for pond	Gently sloping sides, base not seen.	>9.2	>0.4	0.3	Medieval
3	303	Layer		Natural	Same as (127)	9.2	0.4		-
4	401	Layer		Topsoil	Same as (300)	0.5	0.5	0.23	Modern
4	402	Layer		Subsoil	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	0.5	0.5	0.59	Medieval
4	403	Layer		Natural	Same as (127)	0.5	0.5		-

APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project Name	St Mary's Church, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire.	
Short description	<p>A programme of archaeological works was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology during groundworks associated with the installation of a new electricity cable at St Mary's Church, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire.</p> <p>Excavations in the farmyard of Priory Farm revealed six inhumations partially within the cable trench and access pit for directional drilling. Two further grave cuts and a wide post-medieval ditch were also identified. In the field to the south east of the priory buildings groundworks revealed a possible stone lining for a fishpond belonging to the Benedictine priory.</p>	
Project dates	31 Oct – 07 Nov 2012	
Project type	Watching brief	
Previous work	Excavations: 1926 (NMR 633370), 1971-74, 2006 (NMR 1509153)	
Future work	Unknown	
PROJECT LOCATION		
Site Location	Priory Farm, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire	
Study area (M ² /ha)		
Site co-ordinates (8 Fig Grid Reference)	SO 8705 2996	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Brief originator	Carolyn Heighway	
Project Design (WSI) originator	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Manager	Mark Collard	
Project Supervisor	Christopher Leonard	
MONUMENT TYPE		
Parish Church		
SIGNIFICANT FINDS		
None		
PROJECT ARCHIVES		
	Intended final location of archive (museum/Accession no.)	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery/ CAGM 2012.36	For example ceramics, animal bone etc
Paper	Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery/ CAGM 2012.36	Context sheets, matrices etc
Digital	Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery/ CAGM 2012.36	Database, digital photos etc
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2012 <i>St Mary's Church, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire: Archaeological Works</i> . CA typescript report 12344		