

CHURCH OF ST ANDREW, STOKE DAMEREL, PLYMOUTH

(NGR SX 46328 55006)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

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AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology between July 2015 and March 2016 at the Church of St Andrew, Stoke Damerel, Plymouth (NGR SX 46328 55006). The work was undertaken during the installation of a new heating system within the church.

The watching brief has confirmed the presence of six brick lined vaults beneath the former floor of the church and has revealed the presence of a further eight graves. Where human remains were encountered they were left in situ where possible. Where this was not possible they were excavated and recorded, and left on site for reburial by the church.

1. INTRODUCTION (Plates 1 and 2)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by AC archaeology between July 2015 and March 2016 at the Church of St Andrew, Stoke Damerel, Plymouth (NGR SX 46328 55006; Fig.1). The work was commissioned by Le Page Architects Ltd on behalf of St Andrew's PCC.
- 1.2 The work was carried out during the installation of a new heating system within the church. The watching brief was principally carried out in the nave and aisles where the existing wooden board and concrete floor was fully removed to allow for the installation of the new heating system (Plates 1 and 2).
- 1.3 The church is located on slightly elevated ground (at approximately 10m aOD) above the former inlet of Stonehouse Creek. The underlying solid geology comprises Devonian mudstone and siltstone of the Torpoint Formation (BGS 2016).

2. HISTORIC BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The church is a Grade II* Listed Building (National Heritage List no. 1386305), with the following description.

Parish church. C15 tower, otherwise heavily remodelled or rebuilt in 1751 and later altered and restored. Rendered stone with some granite dressings; S porch is Plymouth limestone brought to course and with freestone dressings; dry slate roofs. PLAN: nave/chancel; N and S aisles; W tower; C16 N porch; late C19 S porch.

EXTERIOR: N aisle has 2 late C18 round-arched hornless sashes with glazing bars intersecting at the heads; S aisle windows 1904 by Charles Cheverton in similar style with fixed lights over low transoms; traceried 3-light E window to S aisle and C18 oval lights with radiating glazing bars to E and W gables. C16 4-centred arched N porch doorway with square hoodmould and quatrefoils to spandrels. 3-stage W tower with diagonal buttresses and polygonal pinnacles to embattled parapet; large clockface to 2nd stage; 2-centred arched window over W doorway which now has traceried window, both with hoodmoulds.

INTERIOR: 4-bay arcades with elliptical arches on slender oak Tuscan columns. Fittings: mid C19 Perpendicular style plaster font and pulpit, otherwise late C19 or C20 fittings. Stained glass in E window of N aisle of 1863 with rich colours. Monuments: 1 monument by Isbell and various other C18 and C19 wall monuments to army and navy men.

- 2.2 The church is depicted on Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's engraving of 'The North East Prospect of Plymouth, in the County of Devon' dated 1736. Here it is shown prior to

the major rebuild of the 18th century as a small church with a simple nave east of the short tower, with the only embellishment being a north porch with pediment.

- 2.3 Historic mapping shows that the basic form of the current church, with the nave largely replaced, was in place by the time of the Stoke Damerel tithe map of 1840 and is also shown on the 1:500 Ordnance Survey (OS) town plan of 1857. The north wall of the earlier church appears to have been retained along with the four-pointed arch which had provided access to the north porch, although a long south porch in gothic style (subsequently shortened) indicates that the main access to the church had changed to this direction. The rebuilding of the church in much larger form is regarded as being due to the burgeoning population of the neighbouring dockyard at Devonport during the 18th century (e.g. see Brayshay 1991, 44).
- 2.4 The early maps and several illustrations show the rebuilt nave with a semi-circular apse at the east end between the north and central aisle. Rev. Swete's watercolour dated 1797 shows the apse, windows in the east ends of the north and south aisles, and the north porch blocked and simplified with the pediment removed. This was replaced by a new small porch at the tower end of the north wall (Gray 1999, 167). A watercolour by William Payne, dated to between 1790 and 1800, shows the new porch much enlarged and encroaching uncomfortably on the westernmost of the pair of rounded arch windows in the north wall (Hunt 1986, 13).
- 2.5 The building of the current chancel took place between 1857 and 1894, as it is shown on the revised edition of the 1:500 OS map published in 1894. It required the removal of the south part of the apse with the remaining part of the apse removed after this date when an extension to house the organ machinery was built.

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The aim of the watching brief was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological artefacts and deposits across the area affected by the work, in particular those associated with vaults or graves, earlier floor surfaces and structural remains of the church.
- 3.2 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Passmore 2015) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (revised 2014). All groundworks that had the potential to expose archaeological deposits were monitored by the site archaeologist. Excavation was undertaken using a small mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Machine excavation ceased at the required level, or the level at which archaeological deposits or features were exposed.
- 3.3 All pre-modern archaeological features and deposits exposed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012).
- 3.4 Where human remains were encountered they were left *in situ* where possible. Where this was not possible they were excavated and recorded, and left on site for reburial by the church.

4. RESULTS (Fig. 2; Plates 3-10)

4.1 Introduction

The initial phase of work comprised the monitoring of two access holes cut through the modern board floor within the chancel. The main phase of work comprised the ground reduction of the floor level within the nave and aisles of the church (Plate 3). During this ground reduction nine brick-built tombs (T1-T9), three graves and a further four ill-defined voids which may have been the locations for graves were exposed. The tombs, graves and voids are discussed below in greater detail. A plan showing the location of all features exposed is included as Fig. 2. No finds were collected.

4.2 Access Point 1

Following the removal of the floor for Access Point 1 a layer of concrete was exposed immediately beneath the modern east-west aligned floor joists. No archaeological deposits were observed beneath the floor at this location.

4.3 Access Point 2

Following the removal of the floor surface for Access Point 2 there was a void of 0.74m between the modern floor level and a rubble fill below. The rubble fill dipped towards the east creating a greater void. It was only possible to observe the sub-floor area from the access point, but it was clear that to the north side, matching the line of the chancel wall, was a large stone lintel, with the void continuing beneath it. The base of the chancel floor was a former lime plaster ceiling and it is clear that the area beneath the chancel was formerly a cellar. Investigation of the external chancel walls identified a blocked door, hatch or window in the south wall (Plate 4), however an original entrance may have been beneath the stone lintel in an area now situated beneath the organ loft. To the southwest of Access Point 2 a short stretch of stone wall could be seen; this was located centrally within the chancel and does not match the position of any known walls; it may simply have been constructed to support the suspended wooden floor.

4.4 Tomb 1 (T1) (Plate 5)

Tomb 1 was a large structure with an arched brick and mortar roof and was exposed beneath up to 0.30m of concrete forming the current floor. The structure measured 2.50m long by 2m wide and was aligned north-south. A small void showed that the tomb was filled with rubble material almost to the roof and could not be explored further. The vault was built of handmade bricks (measuring 0.25m x 0.12m x 0.08m) with a lime mortar bond. Slate walls measuring 0.50m wide were exposed on the east and west sides of the vault and appeared to cap the side walls of the tomb. An additional north-south aligned brick structure was partially exposed to the north of the western line of slates. As exposed it was two courses high, measuring 0.64m long (N-S) comprised of five bricks width. This may represent the beginning of steps leading to the tomb, but this could not be confirmed as no further or deeper excavation was necessary.

During the careful hand cleaning of the area to the south of T1 part of a slate wall foundation measuring 0.8m wide was exposed between the westernmost and central pillar separating the nave and the south aisle (Plate 6). Later observations showed that the robbed remains of this wall had probably continued to the east.

4.5 Tomb 2 (T2)

This tomb appeared to be a single grave measuring approximately 2.10m long by 0.35m wide (Plate 7). The vaulted roof and side walls were constructed of handmade

bricks. The tomb was surrounded by a rubble packing composed of abundant shale, lime mortar, stone (possibly original structural fragments) and a silty sandy material. It contained a single wooden coffin that had largely collapsed, although at the west end a coffin handle was still attached and a skull was exposed.

4.6 Tomb 3 (T3) (Plate 7)

Tomb 3 comprised a single brick grave with a vaulted roof. There was evidence that this vault had been damaged at its most westerly end and repaired at a later date. The vault was constructed of machine-made bricks set within a shallow, flat arch and measured 2.40m long by 1.40m wide. The walls were handmade bricks with lime mortar and lime washed on the inside. Following the removal of the roof, the tomb measured 2.10m long by 0.75m wide by 0.90m deep. It contained only a rubble fill at its base.

4.7 Tomb 4 (T4)

This was a brick-built grave with a vaulted roof. It was located directly in front of the north door of the church. It measured, as exposed, 2.50m long by 1.40m wide. Beneath the brick arch the remains of the wooden arch bracing were still attached to the brick. A single lead-lined coffin with the remains of a wooden coffin within were exposed (Plate 8). The east end appeared to be repaired with larger bricks and may have been the location for access.

4.8 Tomb 5 (T5)

Tomb 5 was represented by a vault of handmade bricks which measured 2.40m x 0.60m as exposed. The tomb was not opened as it did not need to be further disturbed by the groundworks.

4.9 Tomb 6 (T6)

Tomb 6 was situated to the south of T4 and against the west wall (Plate 9). It had been heavily truncated by modern brick lined air/ventilation ducts and the excavated material has been used to fill the void. The tomb had a double thickness vaulted roof (0.22m thick) and appeared to be aligned north-south. The tomb was built of handmade bricks with lime mortar.

4.10 Tomb 7 (T7)

A void was exposed at the eastern end of the southern aisle which represented a brick-lined grave in front of the east window of the aisle, approximately 1.2m below the current floor level. The grave was capped by wooden panels that had subsequently rotted, and finished with lime plaster on the inside. It abutted the east wall of the church. Part of a coffin was exposed at the west end of the grave which had collapsed outwards, but no bones were exposed at this level and it was not necessary to investigate the grave further.

4.11 Tomb 8 (T8)

To the south of T7 the north side of a further grave was partially exposed at 0.90m below ground level. The grave was constructed of red brick which was capped by a wooden flat roof.

4.12 Tomb 9 (T9)

At the east end of the north aisle a vault constructed of handmade bricks was only partially exposed, although it appeared to measure at least 2.40m long by 0.60m wide and abut the east wall of the church.

4.13 Grave 1

This grave was initially discovered through the presence of a void exposed during the ground reduction. Further investigation suggested a grave which measured 2.20m long by 0.80m wide and was orientated east-west. It is likely that the grave had a wooden lid and wooden sides which, as the coffin handles were still attached to pieces of wood, have subsequently collapsed. A large amount of disarticulated human bone and coffin nails were exposed at the top of this grave indicating that the burial was sealed by a layer comprising redeposited burial material. An *in situ* skeleton was exposed beneath this deposit at a depth of 1.15m along with fragments of wood with coffin studs and coffin nails. The skeleton was within a mixed very dark brown silty clay with very common slate and stone inclusions, common fragments of wood and disarticulated bone from the overlying deposit.

4.14 Grave 2

This grave was stone lined with a wooden lid that had subsequently collapsed; an *in situ* long bone was also revealed. The grave was not fully exposed but measured approximately 1.80m long by 0.80m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.80m. The stone lining was present on the south side at a depth of 0.55m, with a length of 1.10m exposed, with the northern, eastern and western extents of the grave not exposed by the groundworks.

4.15 Grave 3

This grave comprised a wooden coffin lining on the south side of the void and an *in situ* right arm bone. The grave lay between T2 and T3 and abutted the northwest end of T3. The grave was excavated to a depth of 1m below ground surface where the arm bone was exposed, no further investigation was conducted as the groundworks ceased at this depth.

4.16 Void 1

Immediately to the east of T1 the possible site of an additional grave was exposed. Only four bricks were exposed in this area, but finds of disarticulated bone, coffin nails and a coffin handle clearly indicated the presence of a grave. Up to 0.60m of material was removed from this area through rubble material containing fragments of bone, coffin nails and handles, and slate. The full extent of the grave was not exposed during groundworks.

4.17 Void 2 (Plate 10)

This possible grave was initially discovered through the presence of a void exposed during the ground reduction. The void was too small to determine the size or depth of the grave, but disarticulated bones included a skull, long bone and vertebra were visible along with pieces of wood and what appeared to be part of the metal bracket for a coffin lid. The groundworks continued to a depth of 0.70m below the modern floor level, but no formal grave was exposed.

4.18 Void 3 (Plate 7)

The location of a grave between in T2 and T3 was indicated by the presence of a small number of *in situ* plastered bricks and some evidence of possible timber lining.

4.19 Void 4

This possible grave was initially discovered by the presence of a void to the east of T4 below the north wall windows. No coffin remains were visible. The void was excavated to a depth of 0.70m and consisted of a dark greyish brown very loose deposit with abundant slate and disarticulated bones.

4.20 Additional observation

A marble gravestone was exposed to the west of the organ loft. The inscription read:

Here lies, / The Rev^d. Doct:E:B:Blackett / 1791

The grave which the stone presumably covered was not explored further as it was not otherwise disturbed by the groundworks.

5. COMMENTS

- 5.1** The monitoring of the groundworks within the Church of St Andrew at Stoke Damerel has shown that the sub-floor deposits in the nave and aisles of the church comprise heavily disturbed deposits of mixed greyish brown clayey silt and disarticulated bone cut by tombs and graves. These deposits may relate to the 18th century rebuilding of the church which involved the demolition of all but the tower and north wall of the previous building.
- 5.2** Grave 2, being stone lined, stands out as a potentially earlier form of funerary structure. Its location would have been within the footprint of the nave of the earlier church, but not enough of the grave was exposed to draw further conclusions. The remainder of the surviving features post-date the rebuild although much of the sub-floor deposit appears to be formed from demolition rubble and disturbed burials related to the earlier church on the site.
- 5.3** All of the exposed tombs can be dated to the 18th or 19th centuries. The single tombstone belonging to the Rev. E.B. Blackett, was dated to 1791, which falls within this period.
- 5.4** A wall foundation exposed supporting the pillars marking the boundary between the nave and south aisle is located too far to the south to be related to the earlier church. It is probable that the foundation marks the extent of the earliest 18th century rebuild of the church, which, according to documentary evidence, was soon extended again with the addition of the south aisle. No structural remains of the south wall of the earlier church were exposed and the foundations appear to have been completely removed when the wall they supported was demolished.
- 5.5** The chancel, which is of 19th century date, was provided with a cellar which is now largely filled with rubble and inaccessible. Access to the cellar appears to have been either through a blocked door in the exterior of the south wall or from beneath a lintel in the north wall.

6. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 6.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd under the project number ACD1187, and will be deposited as a digital archive with the Archaeology Data Service.
- 6.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **252303**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The work was commissioned by Le Page Architects Ltd and managed for them by Amanda Le Page and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The site work was undertaken by Elisabeth Patkai, Andrew Passmore and Paul Rainbird. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai and Stella De-Villiers.

8. SOURCE CONSULTED

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Plate 1: View from chancel to nave prior to the commencement of major works, looking west



Plate 2: View of nave and aisles prior to the commencement of major works, looking south



Plate 3: Groundworks in progress, looking southwest



Plate 4: Chancel wall showing blocked access to cellar, looking north (scale 0.2m)



Plate 5: Tomb 1, looking south (scale 1m)



Plate 6: Wall foundation adjacent to Tomb 1, looking south (scale 1m)



Plate 7: Tomb 2 (R), Void 3 centre foreground and Tomb 3 (L), looking west (scale 1m)



Plate 8: Tomb 4, looking north (scale 1m)



Plate 9: Tomb 6, looking north (scale 1m)



Plate 10: Void 2, looking north (scale 1m)

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