

# St Peter's Church, Church Road North, Portishead, North Somerset

A programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording



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**St Peter's Church, Church Road North, Portishead, North Somerset**

**A programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording**

for

**Portishead Parochial Church Council**

by



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**Front cover image:** The Site from the north. © Context One Archaeological Services 2014

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## Non-technical summary

*Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at St Peter's Church, Church Road North, Portishead, North Somerset (the 'Site'), between 13 and 20 August 2014. The project was commissioned by Beech Tyldesley (agent) and funded by Portishead Parochial Church Council (PPCC).*

*The archaeological works were requested by Mr Vince Russett (Archaeology Officer, North Somerset Council) during groundworks for a north-east extension to the Grade I Listed church (List entry number: 1291081). The works were carried out under a faculty, which allowed excavations to take place in a burial ground where there is a potential for human remains to be exposed.*

*The deposit sequence recorded within the foundation trenches was typical for a graveyard, with a layer of redeposited clay raising the ground level. Two graves were exposed each containing a burial and a skull from another individual. The presence of human remains is not surprising given that a church has occupied the Site since the Norman period, although the present church dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (National Heritage List for England). Both graves were sealed beneath the topsoil, indicating that the two partial skeletons most likely relate to a later phase of burial within the churchyard. However, the juvenile skull may have been disturbed by grave cutting and may relate to an earlier grave. Five disarticulated fragments of human bone and an iron coffin handle were also observed during the monitoring programme. None of the human remains were removed from Site and were reinterred below the impact area.*

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at St Peter's Church, Church Road North, Portishead, North Somerset (the 'Site'), between 13 and 20 August 2014. The project was commissioned by Beech Tyldesley (agent) and funded by Portishead Parochial Church Council (PPCC).
- 1.2 Planning approval was received for a north-east extension to the Grade I Listed church (List entry number: 1291081) comprising the erection of a single storey building to the north elevation, following the demolition of an existing WC and boiler room (North Somerset Application ref: 13/P/2416/F). The archaeological works were a condition of planning consent (Condition 9) and were requested by Mr Vince Russett (Archaeology Officer, North Somerset Council) following a consultation request from Ms Angela Norris (Development Control Case Officer, North Somerset Council). In a consultation response, Mr Russett states:

*"this is an extremely archaeologically sensitive area. Portishead is recorded in Domesday (1086) and its name contains Roman elements, implying potential continuity of occupation from 2000 years ago. Although burial areas from the 5<sup>th</sup> century occur away from the parish church site (e.g. HER00446, a late antique burial area close to the former dock), the stabilisation of the parochial system in the 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> century AD implies that there has been a church on this site since then (although with the manorial complex next door, a 10<sup>th</sup> century origin as a manorial chapel cannot be lightly dismissed).*

*References in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to finds of an earlier church during construction of the new chancel (referred to in the D&A statement) and the almost certainty of human remains at the site mean that any below ground intervention will require archaeological intervention."*

- 1.3 The requirement followed advice by Central Government as set out in paragraphs 126 - 141 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012). The works were carried out under a faculty, which allowed excavations to take place in a burial ground where there is a potential for human remains to be exposed.
- 1.4 The programme of archaeological works comprised four elements: the production of a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which set out the project strategy; monitoring and recording during development groundworks; post-excavation and report production; and archive deposition.

## 2. Site location and topography

- 2.1 The Site (centred on NGR ST 46616 76016) is located immediately to the south of Church Road North, in the centre of Portishead (**Figure 1**). It is largely situated on level ground at an average height of c. 16m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). Development groundworks took place within the graveyard and within the footprint of the demolished WC and boiler room at the eastern end of the north-west elevation.

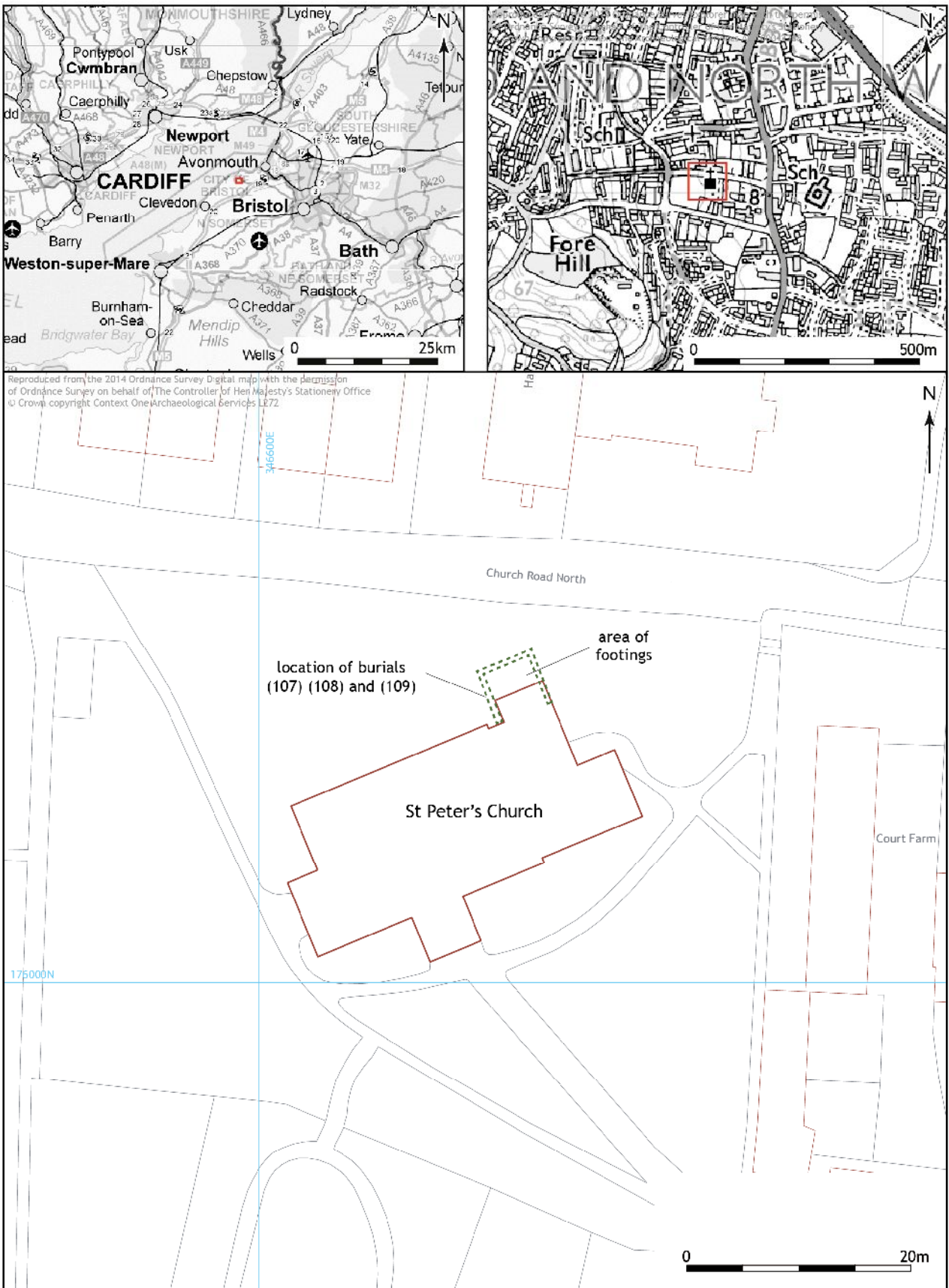


Figure 1. Site setting

### 3. Methodology

#### Development groundworks methodology

- 3.1 Standard strip foundation trenches (c. 0.80m wide and 1.2 - 1.8m deep) were excavated by machine to accept concrete footings for all load bearing walls including all external walls and selected internal partitions. A machine equipped with a 0.80m toothless bucket was used to excavate these trenches. Spoil was stockpiled on tarpaulin sheets adjacent to the pits and was returned to the trenches on completion of the investigation.

#### Archaeological methodology

- 3.2 The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the codes, standards and guidelines set out by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 1985, rev. 2012; 1990, rev. 2008; 1994, rev. 2008). Current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.
- 3.3 A profile section of the deposit sequence within the footing trenches was recorded using a standard COAS *pro forma* profile sheet to illustrate the soil morphology. The profile was recorded as a graphical representation accompanied by a brief description. A photograph including a suitable scale was also taken and the location recorded. COAS *pro forma* skeleton record sheets were used for recording the skeletal remains encountered during the groundworks.
- 3.4 All deposits were recorded as individual contexts and ascribed a unique number. Contexts referenced in this report are presented in standard terms, e.g. (100), (203).
- 3.5 A photographic record of the fieldwork comprised digital images in .jpg format. As a minimum, the record included photographs of each profile section, the Site setting and development works.
- 3.6 All skeletal remains were carefully removed following recording and reinterred below the impact horizon.

### 4. Results

- 4.1 The foundation trenches (**Plate 1**) demonstrated a similar deposit sequence. This comprised topsoil (100); above a make-up layer of re-deposited compacted dark brown/ red silt clay with frequent small stone fragments and gravel (101); overlying a buried topsoil comprising dark brown compacted silt (102); above clean natural red clay (103) (**Plate 2**).



Plate 1. Footing trenches during excavation (from NE)



Plate 2. NE facing section showing grave cuts [104] and [106] (from E; 1m scale)

- 4.2 Two graves ([104] (105) and [106] (107)) were observed within the south-western foundation trench (**Plate 2**), both cut from beneath the topsoil (100) through the underlying layers to the clay natural (103). Grave cut 104 contained the partial skeleton of an infant (107) (**Plate 3**) and a badly disturbed juvenile skull (108) (**Plate 4**). The upper part of the infant skeleton (107) was intact (comprising skull, mandible, cervical vertebrae, clavicle, ribs, sternum) while the mid- to lower part was badly disturbed (comprising metacarpals, pelvis and tibia). Grave cut 106 contained the badly disturbed

partial skeleton of a young adult (109), comprising the mid- section only (ribs, thoracic vertebrae, lumbar vertebrae and carpals).



Plate 3. Infant skeleton (107) (from NW; 0.20m scale)



Plate 4. Juvenile skull (108) (from NE; 0.20m scale)

## 5. The finds

- 5.1 In addition to the recorded human remains discussed above, five fragments of residual human bone and an iron coffin handle were also observed during the monitoring programme.

## 6. Discussion

- 6.1 The deposit sequence recorded within the foundation trenches is typical for a graveyard, with the natural clay covered by a buried topsoil and the overlying redeposited clay raising the ground level. The presence of human remains is not surprising given that a church has occupied the Site since the Norman period, although the present church dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (National Heritage List for England). Two graves were exposed each containing a burial and a skull from another individual. Recording was limited by the confines of the foundation trench and the remains were badly disturbed, however one grave was found to contain the partial skeleton of an infant and the skull of a juvenile, while the other grave contained the partial skeleton of a juvenile.
- 6.2 Both graves were sealed beneath the topsoil and cut through the underlying redeposited clay and buried topsoil, indicating that the two partial skeletons most likely relate to a later phase of burial within the churchyard. However, the juvenile skull may have been disturbed by grave cutting and may relate to an earlier grave. Five disarticulated fragments of human bone and an iron coffin handle were also observed during the monitoring programme. None of the human remains were removed from Site and were reinterred below the impact area.

## 7. Archive

- 7.1 The project archive is currently held by COAS and consists of the following:

Item	Number	Format
Profile/skeleton record sheets	4	Paper
Photograph record sheet	1	Paper
Digital images	29	.JPG

- 7.2 The paper archive has been scanned as a single file in .PDF format and will form part of the physical Site archive to be deposited with North Somerset Museum Service.
- 7.3 Copies of this report will be deposited the client (PPCC) and included as part of the Somerset Historic Environment Record.



## 8. COAS acknowledgements

- 8.1 We would like to thank the following for their contribution to the successful completion of this project:

Vince Russett, County Archaeologist, North Somerset Council  
Mark Taylor, Director, Beech Tyldesley

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