

THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION,
WHIXLEY, NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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On behalf of

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2009, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by Mr Peter Gaze Pace, on behalf of The Church of the Ascension PCC, to undertake a programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording (watching brief) during groundworks associated with the replacement of the entrance footpath and the construction of a vehicle turning area within the churchyard of The Church of the Ascension, Whixley, North Yorkshire (NGR SE44205830). The archaeological recording was a requirement of planning permission (application 6/96/200/FUL).

The watching brief did not uncover or disturb any *in situ* burials, or any *ex situ* or residual human bone. Indeed, no significant archaeological deposits were identified within the shallow trenches (up to 300mm deep) excavated for the new footpath alignment and turning area. With the exception of a recumbent grave slab, all features exposed were either associated with former footpath alignments or modern service provision.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2009, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by Mr Peter Gaze Pace, on behalf of The Church of the Ascension PCC, to undertake a programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording (watching brief) during groundworks associated with the replacement of the entrance footpath and the construction of a vehicle turning area within the churchyard of The Church of the Ascension, Whixley, North Yorkshire (NGR SE44205830).
- 1.2 There was no requirement for the archaeological work to be carried out as part of the Diocesan Faculty, granted by the Diocese of Ripon on 18th March 2009, but there was an archaeological condition placed on the planning permission (application 6/96/200/FUL), granted by Harrogate Borough Council on 27th March 2009.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The Church of the Ascension is located in the northern part of Whixley village, between Whixley Hall and Church Farm, and to the rear of Glebe House (NGR SE44205830) (see figure 1). The archaeological watching brief took place in the churchyard to the south-west of the church, along the existing alignment of the path connecting the south porch of the church and the lychgate.
- 2.2 The church is listed Grade II* for its historical and architectural interest (see Appendix 1). The existing structure dates mainly to the early 14th century with some restoration in 1862, possibly by Sir George Gilbert Scott. It is built of ashlar with a stone and lead roof, and comprises a three stage west tower, a three bay nave with four bay north and south aisles enclosing the tower, and a two bay chancel.
- 2.3 For the purposes of description, the church is considered to be aligned east-west, although the actual alignment is slightly north-west/south-east.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The extent and scope of the archaeological work was not defined by a formal EDAS methods statement, although it was discussed and agreed with the project architect and the PCC. More general advice produced by the Institute of Field Archaeologists in relation to watching briefs (IFA 1999) was also considered. The proposed footpath improvement works were defined by a specification produced by the project architect (Pace 2008). The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the groundworks associated with the replacement of the footpath and the construction of a new turning area, to recover information relating to any archaeological features or deposits which might be uncovered or disturbed.
- 3.2 The church lies at an elevation of c.50m AOD; an Ordnance Survey benchmark on the west face of the tower has a value of 50.07m AOD, and all heights AOD given below are taken from this benchmark. Prior to the start of the ground works, that part of the churchyard to be affected by the works was formed by a north-east/south-west gravelled pathway flanked by mown grass, sloping downwards from north to south from 48.78m AOD to 45.06m AOD. The ground works were sited so as to avoid marked graves, although a single slab had to be slightly displaced as part of the works (see below).
- 3.3 The watching brief took place in several different stages between the 15th and 17th June 2009. On the advice of the contractors (P & R Construction), an initial visit was

made on the 15th June but due to a number of issues, no work was undertaken on site that day. Given the very shallow depth of the proposed ground works (up to 300mm), it was agreed that the contractor could start work and that the archaeologist would attend immediately after completion. A second visit was therefore made on the 16th June 2009 to observe the ground works for the footpath, with an additional visit on the 17th June for the vehicle turning area. All excavations were undertaken using a tracked mini-excavator fitted with a 1m wide scraper bucket.

- 3.4 Following standard archaeological procedures, each discrete stratigraphic entity (e.g. a cut, fill or layer) was assigned an individual context number and detailed information was recorded accordingly. A total of 11 archaeological contexts were recorded; these are all described in the following text as three digit numbers (e.g. 005) (see Appendix 2). Given that the majority of these contexts related either to earlier footpaths or to modern services, detailed *pro forma* context sheets were not completed but summary descriptions were produced as a context register. The positions of all monitored groundworks were marked on a general site plan at a scale of 1:100. A photographic record was also maintained using 35mm colour prints.
- 3.5 With the agreement of the PCC, the project archive, comprising written and photographic elements, will be deposited with Harrogate Museum (site code CAW 09). No artefacts were retained from the watching brief.

4 RESULTS FROM THE WATCHING BRIEF (see figure 2)

- 4.1 The ground works undertaken for the replacement of the footpath comprised the excavation of a shallow trench, aligned north-east/south-west and measuring 2.75m wide and 47.50m long (see plates 1 and 2). The northernmost 21.70m of the trench ran approximately straight, but the southern part followed a slightly sinuous course. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.25m below ground level (BGL) (44.81m AOD). Approximately half way along the west side of the trench, the associated vehicle turning point was excavated. This was aligned north-west/south-east, measured a maximum of 5.10m long by 6.50m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.30m BGL (46.76m AOD).
- 4.2 A similar sequence of deposits was exposed in both parts of the ground works. A layer of either turf and topsoil (001) (or gravel within the area of the former path) extend to 0.10m BGL. This overlay a shallow dark brown friable sandy silt sub-soil (002) generally extending beyond the base of the trench, although within the area of the former path it contained a high proportion of gravel mixed in. All cut features noted were cut into this subsoil.
- 4.3 In the northern part of the footpath trench, a poorly defined linear cut feature (003) with an indistinct fill of gritty dull orange sand and frequent pantile inclusions ran along the length of the trench for c.10m. This feature measured 1.2m wide at the north end, but was generally 0.5m wide elsewhere. It appeared to be the cut for a pipe. Further to the south-west, another poorly defined cut (004) 0.5m wide could be seen running along the west side of the trench, filled with sandy gravel and modern plastic membrane (005), which was revealed to conceal a modern 0.12m diameter plastic drain pipe.
- 4.4 The main feature in the southern part of the trench was the alignment of the former footpath, marked by a well-defined spread of clean soft dark brown sand up to 1.4m wide (006). At its southern end, the footpath appeared to diverge to the west as well

as continuing southwards, and also appeared to preserve evidence for at least one realignment or re-cutting. A well-defined service cut (008) filled with an orange sand/gravel mix (007) ran along its eastern edge of the former path alignment.

- 4.5 Within the area of the vehicle turning area, the same depths of topsoil (001) and sub-soil (002) were noted as in the main footpath trench (see plate 3). The sub-soil (002) overlay a reddish brown silty sand (011) with frequent flecks of sandstone and rounded pebbles, only visible in the base of the excavated area, i.e. at 0.30m BGL.
- 4.6 The general lack of archaeological deposits encountered, and the shallow nature of the excavations, meant that a decision was made not to observe the southernmost 6.0m-7.0m length of the footpath trench, as it approached the lychgate.
- 4.7 A single memorial had to be relocated as part of the ground works. Towards the northern end of the western side of the new footpath trench, a recumbent sandstone slab was moved c.0.40m to the west of its original position. The grave slab was aligned north-west/south-east, and had maximum dimensions of 1.90m long by 0.87m wide. It had an incised margin line but the inscription was very worn. The rounded incised capitals appeared to read "HERE LYETH THE BODY / OF SAMUEL WILSON / THE SON / OF (?) WILSON AND / (rest illegible) ". A date at the bottom of the slab read "17(?)7", possibly 1717, although this would seem rather early for the slab, which is perhaps more likely to be mid to later 18th century in date. When it was moved, the slab was seen to overlie a brick-lined vault. The bricks used in the construction of the vault were reddish-orange handmade examples (average width 130mm), set with a cream lime mortar (009). The long sides of the vault were formed by two rows of bricks running parallel to one another, and the east end by a single course set at a right angle to these. The vault itself was infilled with a soft mid-brown sand (010) but was apparently very narrow internally, barely 0.40m in width. Neither the vault structure or the infill were disturbed by the footpath works.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The watching brief did not uncover or disturb any *in situ* burials, or any *ex situ* or residual human bone. Indeed, no significant archaeological deposits were identified within the shallow trenches excavated for the new footpath alignment and turning area. With the exception of the grave slab, all features exposed were either associated with former footpath alignments or modern service provision.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

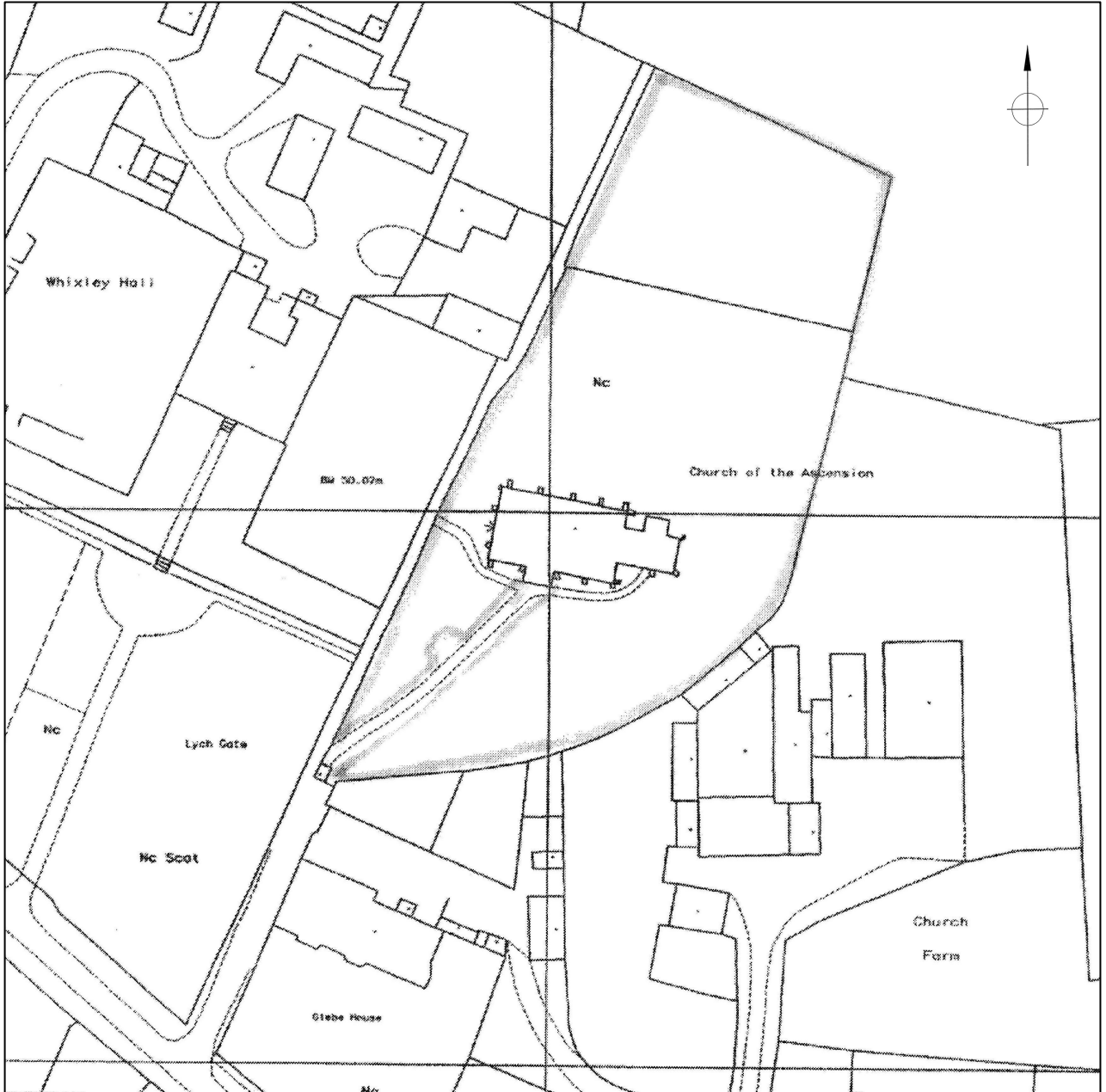
IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists) 1999 *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (and subsequent revisions)

Pace, G 2008 *The Church of the Ascension, Whixley, Diocese of Ripon: Specification for Improvements to the Entrance Path*

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

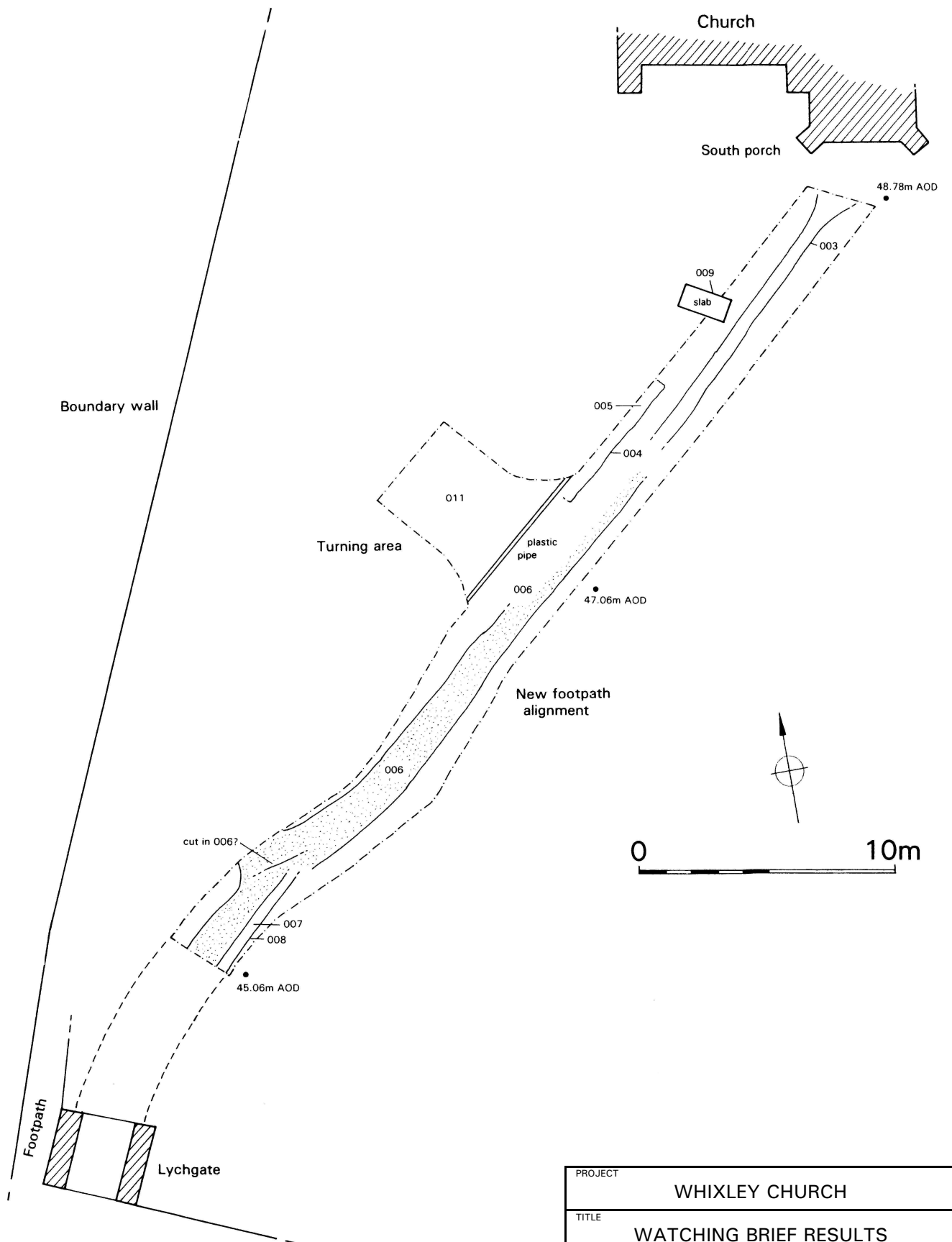
- 7.1 The archaeological watching brief at the Church of the Ascension was commissioned by the PCC, through Peter Pace (architect). EDAS would like to thank Barry Smith (church warden), Peter Pace and P & R Construction for their help and co-operation in carrying out the archaeological recording.

7.2 The on-site recording was undertaken by Shaun Richardson of EDAS, who also produced the site archive. The final report was produced by Ed Dennison of EDAS, with whom the responsibility for any errors remains.



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PROJECT		WHITLEY CHURCH	
TITLE		GENERAL LOCATION	
SCALE	NTS	DATE	JAN 2010
EDAS		FIGURE	1



PROJECT		WHITLEY CHURCH	
TITLE		WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS	
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	JAN 2010
EDAS		FIGURE	2



Plate 1: Path trench after excavation, looking S.

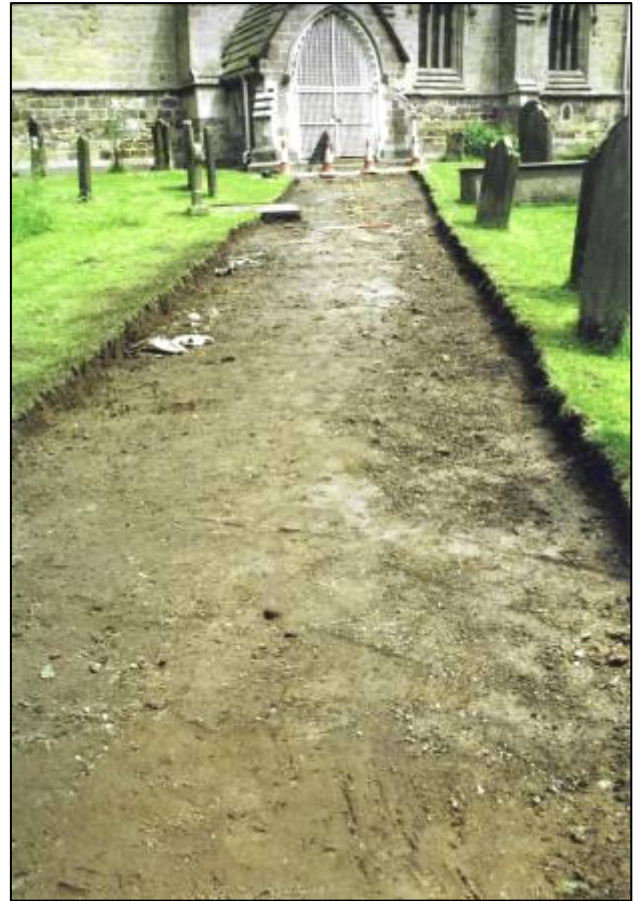


Plate 2: Path trench after excavation, looking N.



Plate 3: Vehicle turning area after excavation, looking N.

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF RECORDED CONTEXTS

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>
001	Dark brown friable sandy silt, 0.10m thick - topsoil.
002	Dark brown friable sandy silt up to 0.15m thick, high proportion of gravel in former path area - subsoil.
003	Pipe cut - indistinct, 1.2m wide at north end, generally 0.50m wide, filled with gritty dull orange sand with frequent inclusions of pantile and stone up to 0.10m across.
004	Pipe cut - indistinct and poorly defined, parallel to west side of trench, c.0.5m wide.
005	Fill of 004 - 50% modern gravel, 50% orange sand, also modern membrane for 0.12m diameter plastic pipe.
006	Former path alignment - well defined spread of clean soft dark brown sand up to 1.4m wide.
007	Fill of 008 - 50% angular gravel, 50% orange sand.
008	Possible linear service cut within 006.
009	Vault lining, of reddish-orange handmade bricks (0.13m wide) with cream lime mortar. Two parallel lines of brick forming N and S sides, one to E end.
010	Fill of vault 009 - clean soft mid-brown sand.
011	Reddish-brown silty sand, in base of stripped area, with frequent flecks of sandstone and rounded pebbles up to 0.10m in size.

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 1: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

IoE Number: 330654

Location: Church of the Ascension, Church Street (north off), Whixley, Harrogate, North Yorkshire

Date listed: 15 March 1966

Date of last amendment: 15 March 1966

Grade: II*

Mainly early C14 with some restoration 1862 possibly by Sir George Gilbert Scott. Ashlar with stone and lead roof. West tower, 3-bay nave with north and south aisles enclosing tower, 2-bay chancel. West tower of 3 stages with Perpendicular window to belfry, embattled parapet with crocketed finials and pyramidal roof. North and south aisles of 4 bays with intersected tracery to two 3-light windows. South porch has hoodmould with head-stops, the arch has ballflower decoration. Lower, 2-bay chancel has two 3-light windows similar to aisle. Door between has hoodmould with head-stops. East window of 5 lights with cusping and 6-pointed roundel to top. Chancel north side has a round-headed window at east end. Buttresses to aisles and chancel have offsets and ridged sloping tops repeated in the window ledges. Ashlar copings with crocketed finials, gable cross to chancel. Interior: quatrefoil columns carry north and south arcades under the tower. Double-chamfered arches have hoodmoulds on head-stops. South aisle has piscina at east end and tomb of Christopher Tancred (d. 1754) at the west end. Christopher Tancred's tomb was removed from the chapel at Whixley Hall (q.v.) in 1905.

Source: Images of England website (www.imagesofengland.org.uk)