

CHURCH OF ST MARY,
STRENSALL, YORK

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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On behalf of

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, CHURCH OF ST MARY, STRENSALL, YORK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2004, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by the Revd M Harrison and the Parochial Church Council, through their architect Linda Lockett of York, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a new access ramp and handrails at the Church of St Mary, Strensall, York (formerly North Yorkshire) (NGR SE 6298 6078).

The extent of the ground disturbance was limited, and consisted of two 0.36m wide trenches dug to a maximum depth of 0.30m along the sides of an existing flagstone path which ran to the south porch. Trench 1, running south from the south-west corner of the porch, exposed a gas pipe, while Trench 3, running east from the south-east corner of the porch, revealed a section of wall footing 0.25m below the existing ground level. This wall footing was located c.1.0m to the east of the south-east corner of the porch. It ran north-south across the trench, measured 0.50m wide, and was composed of at least two courses of re-used brick and floor tile bonded with a lime mortar.

The narrow width of the excavated trenches made any positive interpretation of the exposed features difficult. However, it would seem that the north-south aligned brick wall footing represents part of the brick-built church which was erected c.1800 and then demolished when the present church was built in 1865-66. It is also likely that a brick plinth seen beneath the sandstone wall of the west side of the porch is related to the same structure. The material overlying the north-south wall footing, a dirty brown loam containing brick, tile and sandstone rubble, is likely to represent a demolition deposit associated with this 19th century structure, while a fine rubble sandstone hardcore seen at a higher level is probably related to the construction of the existing church.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In February 2004, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by the Revd M Harrison and the Parochial Church Council, through their architect Linda Lockett of York, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a new access ramp and handrails at the Church of St Mary, Strensall, York (formerly North Yorkshire) (NGR SE 6298 6078).
- 1.2 The construction works were granted a Diocesan faculty on 17th December 2003 and, although there was no condition imposed for archaeological recording, a watching brief was undertaken at the request of the church architect.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 St Mary's church lies off the north side of Church Lane, at the north-west end of the core of the medieval village of Strensall (see figure 1).
- 2.2 The church was built in 1865-66 at a cost of about £1,700, from the designs of Sir Gilbert Scott by J B and W Atkinson. It is constructed of sandstone and Westmorland slate in a geometric Early English style, and comprises a west tower surmounted by a spire, a 4-bay nave with a south porch, a 2-bay chancel with a north vestry, and a 20th century parish room attached to the north side. The construction of the chancel was funded by Leonard Thompson, the rest of the church by public subscription and a donation from the Diocesan Church Building Society (Bulmers' 1890 Directory; Pevsner 1966, 360). It is also a Grade II Listed Building (see Appendix 2).
- 2.3 The original, medieval, church also stood on the same site, but this was demolished in about 1798 or 1800, when a brick building was erected. This was, in turn, demolished when the present church was built in 1865-66 (Calthrop 1923, 195).

3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 No specification or brief was produced for the archaeological watching brief. EDAS used their experience gained from numerous other similar projects, and more general advice produced by the Institute of Field Archaeologists in relation to watching briefs (IFA 1999).
- 3.2 The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the groundworks associated with the installation of the new access ramp, to recover any information relating to any archaeological features or deposits which might be uncovered or disturbed. Prior to the groundworks commencing, the east-west aligned path leading to the south porch was surfaced with York stone flags bounded by gravel and stone kerbs. The archaeological watching brief took place on 12th February 2004.
- 3.3 All groundworks were dug by hand, to create two parallel trenches 0.36m wide and 0.30m deep which formed the foundations for the north and south sides of the 1 in 16 gradient east-west aligned access ramp (see plate 1). The rest of the works involved lifting the existing flagstones and laying new hardcore material to form a firm surface; these works were not monitored as no ground disturbance was required.
- 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 on *pro forma* context sheets. A total of ten archaeological contexts were recorded; these are all described in the following text as three digit numbers (e.g. 005) (see Appendix 1). In-house recording and quality control procedures ensured that all recorded information was cross-referenced as appropriate. The positions of all monitored groundworks were marked on a general site plan, and more detailed drawings were made of each area as necessary; a photographic record was also maintained using 35mm colour prints.

- 3.5 With the agreement of the church authorities, the project archive, comprising written and photographic elements, has been deposited with the East Riding of Yorkshire Museum Service (site code SMS 04; accession number 2006/83). Only a few artefacts were noted during the watching brief, and none were retained.

4 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS (see figure 2)

- 4.1 Trench 1, excavated immediately to the south of the porch, revealed a thin layer of brown loamy soil with gravel (001) less than 0.14m thick underneath the flagstones, and overlying a c.0.18m depth of fine sandstone rubble hardcore (002). This in turn overlay a fine, orange-brown sand (003) of unknown depth. All these three deposits had been cut by a recent trench (004) which had been excavated for a gas pipe which ran approximately north-south, and then east-west along the line of the southern kerb; the fill of the trench was a loose brown loam containing small stones, gravel and brick fragments (005). The excavation at the north end of the trench, adjacent to the south-west corner of the porch, revealed a brick plinth (008) under the main sandstone foundation (010); the bricks measured 78mm thick and 102mm wide but only one course was exposed.
- 4.2 Trench 2 followed the south side of the flagstone path, and was excavated for a distance of c.12.0m in an eastwards direction. The deposits in this trench were dominated by the gas pipe trench and its fill (004/005), although further to the east a friable brown topsoil (009) was visible.
- 4.3 Trench 3 was excavated eastwards from the south-east corner of the porch for a distance of c.8.0m. At a point c.1.0m from the west end of the trench, a north-south wall footing (007) was visible, 0.50m wide and 0.25m below the turf surface. The footings comprised at least two courses of re-used brick and floor tiles heavily bonded with a lime mortar, and they appeared to run north towards the wall of the nave; the full depth of the footings was not revealed in the shallow trench (see plate 2). Although OD levels were not taken, the footings appeared to be at approximately the same level as the brick plinth (008) beneath the porch. The footings were overlain by a disturbed deposit of dirty brown loam containing much brick, tile and sandstone rubble (006) with the turf and topsoil (009) averaging 0.27m thick above. There was no evidence of any continuation of the footings in the adjacent trench (Trench 2), although they may have been removed when the path was first laid.
- 4.4 Two sherds of post-medieval "blackware" pottery were noted in Trenches 1 and 2, as well as several sherds of 19th/20th century china. An unglazed bodysherd and an unglazed base sherd from two different pots of indeterminate date, but likely to be post-medieval, were also found. None of these finds were retained, but were returned to the trench. Several residual fragments of human bone, including skull, mandible, femur, vertebrae and scapula, were also found in Trenches 2 and 3, and were reburied in Trench 1.

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1 The narrow width of the excavated trenches made any positive interpretation of the exposed features difficult. However, it would seem that the portion of the north-south aligned brick wall footing (007) seen in Trench 3 represents part of the brick-built church which was erected c.1800 and then demolished when the present church was built in 1865-66. It is also likely that the brick plinth (008) underlying the sandstone wall of the west side of the porch is related to the same structure. The material overlying the north-south wall footing, a dirty brown loam containing brick, tile and sandstone rubble (006), is likely to represent a demolition deposit associated with this 19th century brick-built structure, while the sandstone rubble hardcore (002) seen at a higher level is probably related to the construction of the existing church.

6 REFERENCES

Bulmers' 1890 Directory: History and Directory of North Yorkshire, Strensall parish (www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS/NRY/Strensall/Strensall90.html accessed 6th October 2006)

Calthrop, C M 1923 "Strensall". In Page, W (ed) *Victoria County History of the County of York North Riding volume 2*, 193-195 (reprinted 1968)

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

Listed Building description (www.imagesofengland.org.uk accessed 6th October 2006)

Pevsner, N 1966 *Buildings of England: Yorkshire the North Riding*

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

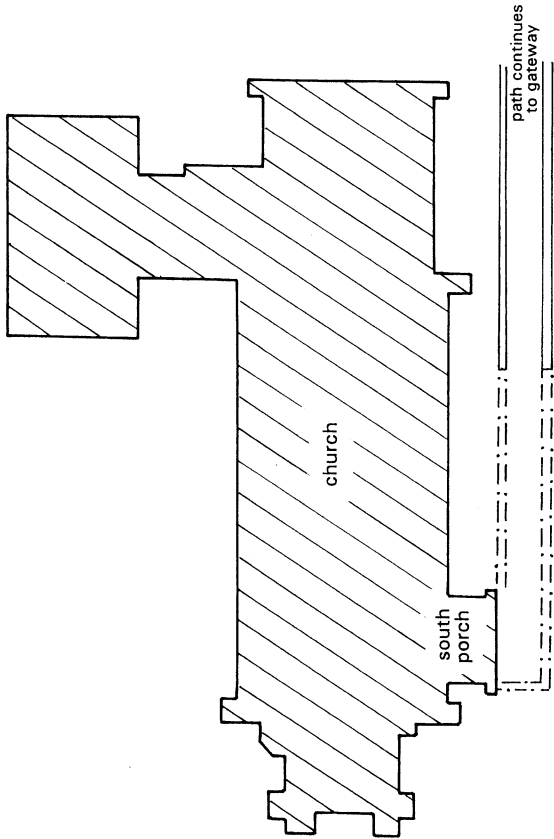
- 7.1 The archaeological watching brief was commissioned and funded by the Parochial Church Council and Revd M Harrison, through Linda Lockett, the church architect. EDAS would like to thank them for their co-operation in carrying out the work. The on-site recording was undertaken by Kate Dennett, on behalf of EDAS, and she also produced the fieldwork records. Ed Dennison produced the final report and drawings, and the responsibility for any errors or inconsistencies remains with him.



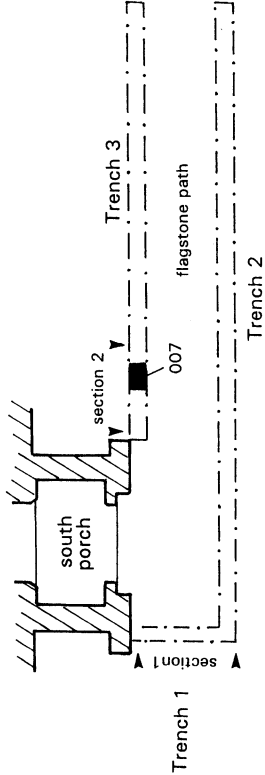
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PROJECT	
ST MARY'S CHURCH, STRENSALL	
TITLE	
GENERAL LOCATION	
SCALE	DATE
NTS	OCT 2006
EDAS	FIGURE
	1

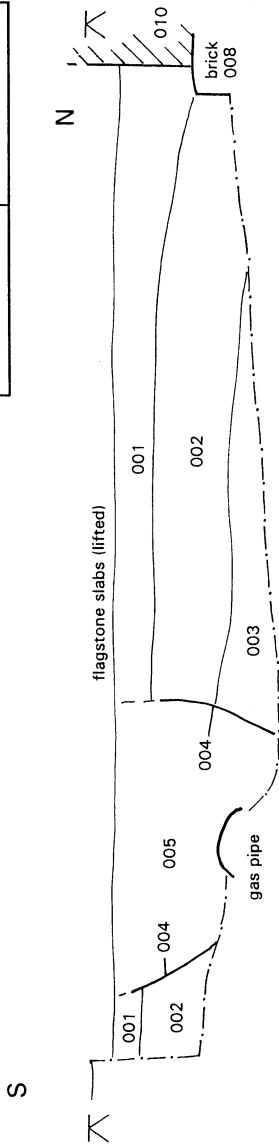
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TITLE	WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS		
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	OCT 2006
EDAS		FIGURE	2



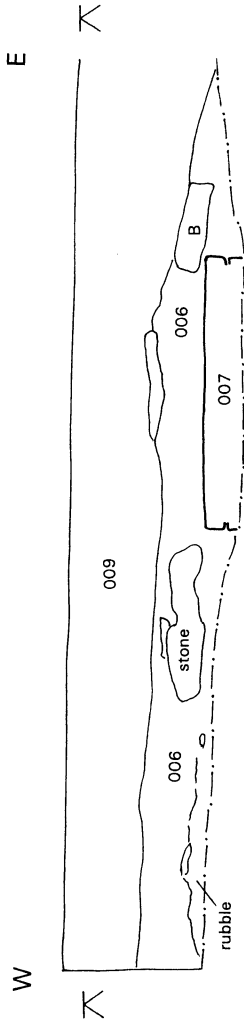
General plan



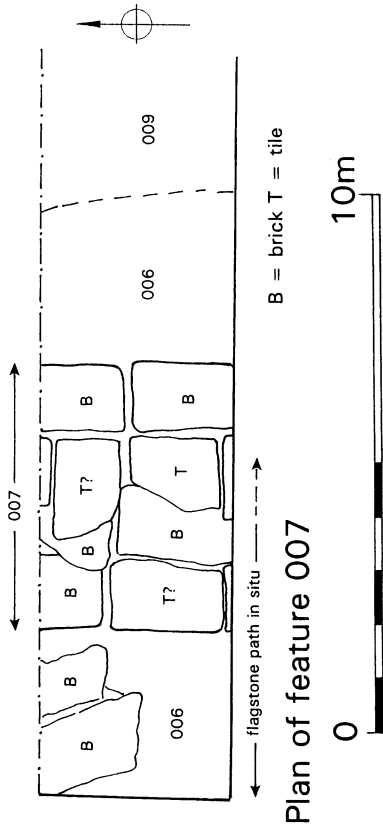
Plan



Section 1: west side of Trench 1



Section 2: north side of Trench 2



Plan of feature 007



Plate 1: General view of work in progress, looking west.



Plate 2: Brick feature 007 in Trench 3 (east to right).

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONTEXTS

001	Brown loam soil beneath paving slabs, <0.14m thick.
002	Fine limestone rubble (hardcore) <0.18m thick.
003	Orange-brown fine clean sandy soil.
004	Shallow, bowl-shaped cut for gas pipe.
005	Brown loam with gravel and stones - fill of 004.
006	Dirty brown loam with brick, tile and limestone rubble >0.13m thick.
007	North-south brick foundation 0.50m wide.
008	Brick and tile foundation revealed as a plinth beneath south wall of porch.
009	Turf and friable brown loamy topsoil <0.27m thick.
010	Sandstone foundation of porch.

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Location : CHURCH OF ST MARY, CHURCH LANE (north side), STRENSALL, YORK, NORTH YORKSHIRE

IoE number : 328617

Date listed : 12 DECEMBER 1986

Date of last amendment : 12 DECEMBER 1986

Grade : II

1856-6 and late C20 addition. J B and W Atkinson. Sandstone and Westmorland slate. West tower, 4-bay nave with south porch, 2-bay chancel with north vestry and C20 parish room. In Geometric style. 3-stage tower with angle buttresses. West front: 2-light window with trefoil window and relieving arch above. Twin belfry windows to each face. Spire. South porch: pointed doorway of single order on shafted responds. 2-light windows to nave, single-light windows to chancel. 3-light window to east end. No internal features of merit. C20 extension not of special interest. Pevnsen N, North Yorkshire: The North Riding, 1966.

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