

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH,
THROAPHAM, SOUTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Report no: 2007/319.R01
Version: Final
Date: May 2009
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2007, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by the Churches Conservation Trust to undertake a programme of archaeological observation and recording (a watching brief) during the excavation of a new drainage trench and soakaway in the grave yard at St John the Baptist church, in Throapham, South Yorkshire (NGR SK52308760).

The narrow width of the new drainage trench, only up to 0.4m wide, meant that it was difficult to identify and record items of archaeological interest during the watching brief. However, the majority of the trench followed previously disturbed ground, which had been dug for an earlier now disused ceramic drain (006). In addition, and somewhat fortuitously considering the crowded and neglected nature of the churchyard, the soakaway pit was placed in a position where there had already been some damage caused by tree roots.

Nevertheless, one possible in situ but previously damaged burial (014) was identified in the base of the new drainage trench close to the south-east corner of the chancel, and a few possible pieces of kerb stone or grave slab (010 and 011) were noted in the sides of the trench. Part of another in situ burial (015) was seen in the base of the soakaway pit. Both burials, which lay at depths of c.1m below existing ground level, were left undisturbed and disarticulated material was reburied in the drainage trench. It is interesting to note that the presence of in situ burials in this part of the churchyard contrasts with the results from a previous watching brief which had examined admittedly limited areas to the north-east of the church in 2004.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In November 2007, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by the Churches Conservation Trust to undertake a programme of archaeological observation and recording (a watching brief) during the excavation of a new drainage trench and soakaway in the grave yard at St John the Baptist church, in Throapham, South Yorkshire (NGR SK52308760).
- 1.2 Although not stipulated as a condition of the Diocesan Faculty, which was granted on 27th March 2008, the owners of the redundant church, the Churches Conservation Trust, wished for a watching brief to be undertaken in accordance with their Archaeological Policy (Churches Conservation Trust 2004b). The watching brief was defined by a brief produced by the South Yorkshire Archaeology Service (SYAS) (see Appendix 3).

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 St John's church lies in an isolated location, on the west side of an unclassified road which links the villages of Laughton en le Morthen and Dinnington, some 3km to the east-south-east of Thurcroft, close to the junction of the M1 and M18 motorways, in South Yorkshire (NGR SK52308760) (see figure 1).
- 2.2 A policy of minimal maintenance in the churchyard was in operation at the time of the watching brief, with the aim of keeping it as an environmentally friendly wildlife site; this meant that the churchyard was heavily overgrown. As a result, many upright gravestones and their kerbs were covered by vegetation and briars, while horizontal slabs were disappearing beneath soil and vegetation build-up, and their inscriptions were no longer visible or accessible.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The church is considered to be Anglo-Saxon in origin, and is listed as a building of Special Architectural and Historic Interest, Grade I (see Appendix 2). The church has also been discussed by Ryder in his study of South Yorkshire churches (Ryder 1982, 97-98), while the South Yorkshire County Sites and Monuments Record contains some further notes by Ryder and a detailed description produced by the Council for Places of Worship (1980). The Churches Conservation Trust (2004a) have also produced a recent booklet on the church.
- 3.2 The church consists of an aisled nave, a chancel with north chapel, a western tower and a south porch. The structural development of the building is complex, with at least seven different phases having been recognised by Ryder. However, there are still some unresolved details relating to the evolution of the church.
- 3.3 The north, south and east walls of the nave, which are only 0.65m wide and survive above the inserted arcades and chancel arch, represent the remains of an aisleless church of pre-Conquest (possibly 11th century) date. This building was 4.9m wide internally and had an attached chancel c.3.1m wide. The south door is of Norman date, but it is not *in situ*, probably having been moved from its original location in the earlier south wall when the south aisle was added. The north and south aisles were added in c.1200, when the chancel was also rebuilt, probably on its present scale; only a short section of this rebuilt chancel remains, externally at the west end of the south wall.

- 3.4 The north aisle was extended east as a chancel chapel in the 14th century, while the west tower and clerestory were added in the 15th century. The structural evidence suggests that the nave was actually truncated before the three stage tower was built. In the 16th century the north walls of the north aisle and chancel chapel appear to have been at least partially rebuilt in two distinct types of masonry. The church also underwent major restoration works in 1709, when the chancel was rebuilt to virtually ground level and the south porch was added; a plaque commemorating this work has since been lost. As a result, there is a noticeable change in angle between the chancel and the main body of the church.
- 3.5 Documentary records of 1846 suggest that the church was by then in a ruinous condition, and it was subsequently restored by the Victorians. This work included the replacement of the windows in the chancel and south aisle, the insertion of a priest's door in the south chancel wall, the total rebuilding of the east wall of the north chapel, and replacement or renewal of the roof. The church is now redundant and was vested with the Churches Conservation Trust in 1985, and they have carried out various other repair work in recent years.
- 3.6 A previous archaeological watching brief was undertaken by EDAS at St John's church in December 2004, during the excavation of a trench for a new electricity supply. No finds of archaeological interest were recorded by this work (Dennison & Dennett 2005).

4 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The scope of the watching brief was defined by a brief produced by the South Yorkshire Archaeology Service (SYAS) (see Appendix 3). EDAS also took account of guidance produced by the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists (ADCA 2004) and the Institute for Archaeologists (IFA 2001) in relation to watching briefs, as well as the Churches Conservation Trust's Archaeology Policy (2004b).
- 4.2 The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the excavation of a new drainage trench and soakaway that was required to be dug off the east end of the church, and to record and recover any information relating to any archaeological features or deposits which might be uncovered or disturbed by the works. Care had been taken by the church architect to avoid any known graves within the drainage run, but it was still possible that other, unmarked, graves would be disturbed by the excavations.
- 4.3 The new drainage trench was aligned north-south and ran for a distance of c.14m, and was designed to connect with the east end of an existing east-west drainage trench which ran close to and parallel to the north side of the church (see figure 2). The new soakaway pit was excavated at the south end of the new drainage trench. A mechanical mini-excavator was used to dig the main trench, the north end being 0.78m deep below existing ground level and gradually sloping down to a depth of 1.02m below existing ground level at the south end; the trench was between 0.35m and 0.40m wide (see plates 1 and 2). Due to the presence of a grave slab, unmarked on the architect's plan and identified beneath soil and vegetation build-up, the position of the soakaway had to be moved slightly to the west. The mechanical excavations were completed by hand, although it proved easier to distinguish and control the different contexts during mechanical excavation in the narrow trench. The soakaway pit measured 1.0m by 1.5m.
- 4.4 The excavations were continuously monitored and the on-site recording took place on 7th July 2008. 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 15 archaeological contexts were recorded, and these are described in the following text as three digit numbers (e.g. 005) (see also Appendix 1). In-house recording and quality control procedures ensured that all recorded information was cross-referenced as appropriate. The positions of the excavations were marked on a general site plan at 1:50 scale, but the nature of the stratigraphy meant that more detailed plans and sections were not required. A photographic record was also maintained using a digital camera, although the wet weather conditions did hamper photography.

- 4.5 In accordance with the SYAS brief (see Appendix 3), and with the agreement of the Churches Conservation Trust, the project archive, comprising written and photographic elements, has been deposited with Clifton Park Museum in Rotherham (site code SJT 08). No artefacts were retained from the watching brief, and all fragments of disarticulated human bone were collected together from the spoil and reburied in the trench.

5 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS (see figure 2)

- 5.1 The new drainage trench proved to be aligned along the line of an earlier and slightly wider trench, dug for a now disused glazed ceramic drain (006), initially visible beneath the active plastic drain pipe (008) which drained the north-east corner of the chancel. Although it was not possible to distinguish the cut for the earlier trench, the 0.13m wide ceramic pipe was in good condition; it lay at 0.48m below existing ground level and ran for a distance of at least 7.50m to the south, and was probably installed in the 20th century. The trench had been backfilled with a mixed yellow-brown loam and silty clay which contained occasional fragments of slate and stone (004). Beneath the ceramic pipe (006), but at the same depth, towards the south end of the trench, a disused metal water pipe (009) appeared to continue south for a distance of 4.40m before turning to the east.
- 5.2 A layer of dark reddish-brown ash and burnt coke (002) up to 0.22m thick was noted beneath the topsoil and vegetation (001) immediately to the east of the chancel. This material was exposed for a length of c.5.40m by the new trench excavation, and it overlay a thin layer of firm crushed limestone/gravel (003) only 0.04m thick. This probably acted as the base for an ash path which appeared to have been laid after the trench cut for the glazed ceramic drain (006) had been infilled.
- 5.3 Disarticulated human bones were frequently encountered in the new drainage trench, in contrast to those areas in the north part of the churchyard which had been examined during the previous 2004 watching brief (Dennison & Dennett 2005); these bones were placed back into the drainage trench. It would appear that most of the present trench was cut through the backfill (004) of the earlier drainage trench, although it was difficult to distinguish this material from the general deposit of disturbed friable light brown fine silty soil/clay (005) which covered most of the graveyard in this area.
- 5.4 At a point 1.00m to the north of the south-east corner of the chancel, a possible extended in situ adult burial (014), lying east-west, was encountered in the base of the new drainage trench (at c.1.00m below ground level). Part of a skull, and the sternum, a scapula and clavicle were present, although the mandible was missing, presumably disturbed by the earlier drainage work (see plate 4). The narrow width of the trench did not allow further exposure of the burial, and the disturbed bones were re-buried at the same location; being in the base of the new trench, the majority of the burial was left undisturbed. Immediately to the north of the skull, two blocks of roughly shaped stone (011), each measuring c.0.18m by 0.10m, were

noted in the west side of the trench, but they were not extracted or examined further; it was not possible to determine whether they were connected to the adjacent potential in situ burial (014).

- 5.5 The 1.0m wide soakaway pit was dug through an area of dense tree roots, which had caused considerable disturbance to the soils (see plate 3). At a depth of 1.10m below the existing ground level, the side of a skull (015) was encountered in the north side of the pit and, when the base of the pit was cleaned by hand, one side of a possible short east-west grave cut (007) was encountered. However, the loose soils resulting from the tree root disturbance here meant it was difficult to clearly separate the cut from the possible grave fill, a friable brown loam (012). In view of the possible burial, it was decided to leave the soakaway pit at the depth reached, and adjust the slope of the drainage pipe instead. It was noted that the existing ground surface here sloped down considerably towards the south, towards a footpath, although adjacent tree roots made it difficult to establish the land surface at this point. A very firm yellow-brown silty clay (013) was exposed in the very bottom of the soakaway pit, which was assumed to be a natural deposit.
- 5.6 Just beyond the point where the north-south trench turned to the west to avoid an unmarked horizontal grave slab, the corner of a large piece of roughly dressed stone (010) was noted standing vertically, c.0.3m beneath the ground surface. The stone, more than 0.68m high, was of a fine, soapy, creamy white material, similar to or possibly alabaster. Only one vertical corner was exposed, and so it was difficult to identify, but it might have been part of a vault or possibly a memorial sculpture associated with the adjacent unmarked grave slab.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The narrow width of the new drainage trench, only up to 0.4m wide, meant that it was difficult to identify and record items of archaeological interest during the watching brief. However, the majority of the trench followed previously disturbed ground, which had been dug for an earlier now disused ceramic drain (006). In addition, and somewhat fortuitously considering the crowded and neglected nature of the churchyard, the soakaway pit was placed in a position where there had already been some damage caused by tree roots.
- 6.2 Nevertheless, one possible in situ but previously damaged burial (014) was identified in the base of the new drainage trench close to the south-east corner of the chancel, and a few possible pieces of kerb stone or grave slab (010 and 011) were also noted in the trench sides. Part of another in situ burial (015) was seen in the base of the soakaway pit. Both burials, which lay at depths of c.1m below existing ground level, were left undisturbed and disarticulated material was reburied in the drainage trench. It is interesting to note that the presence of in situ burials in this part of the churchyard contrasts with the results from a previous watching brief which had examined admittedly limited areas to the north-east of the church in 2004 (Dennison & Dennett 2005).

7 REFERENCES

ADCA (Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists) 2004 *Guidance Note 1: Archaeological Requirements for Works on Churches and Churchyards*

Churches Conservation Trust 2004a *Church of St John the Baptist, Throapham, South Yorkshire*

Churches Conservation Trust 2004b *Archaeology Policy* (unpublished mss document)

Council for Places of Worship 1980 "Throapham, St John, South Yorkshire (Sheffield)" (unpublished notes in South Yorkshire SMR)

Dennison, E & Dennett, K 2005 *St John the Baptist Church, Throapham, South Yorkshire: Archaeological Watching Brief* (unpublished EDAS report 2004/249.R01 for Churches Conservation Trust)

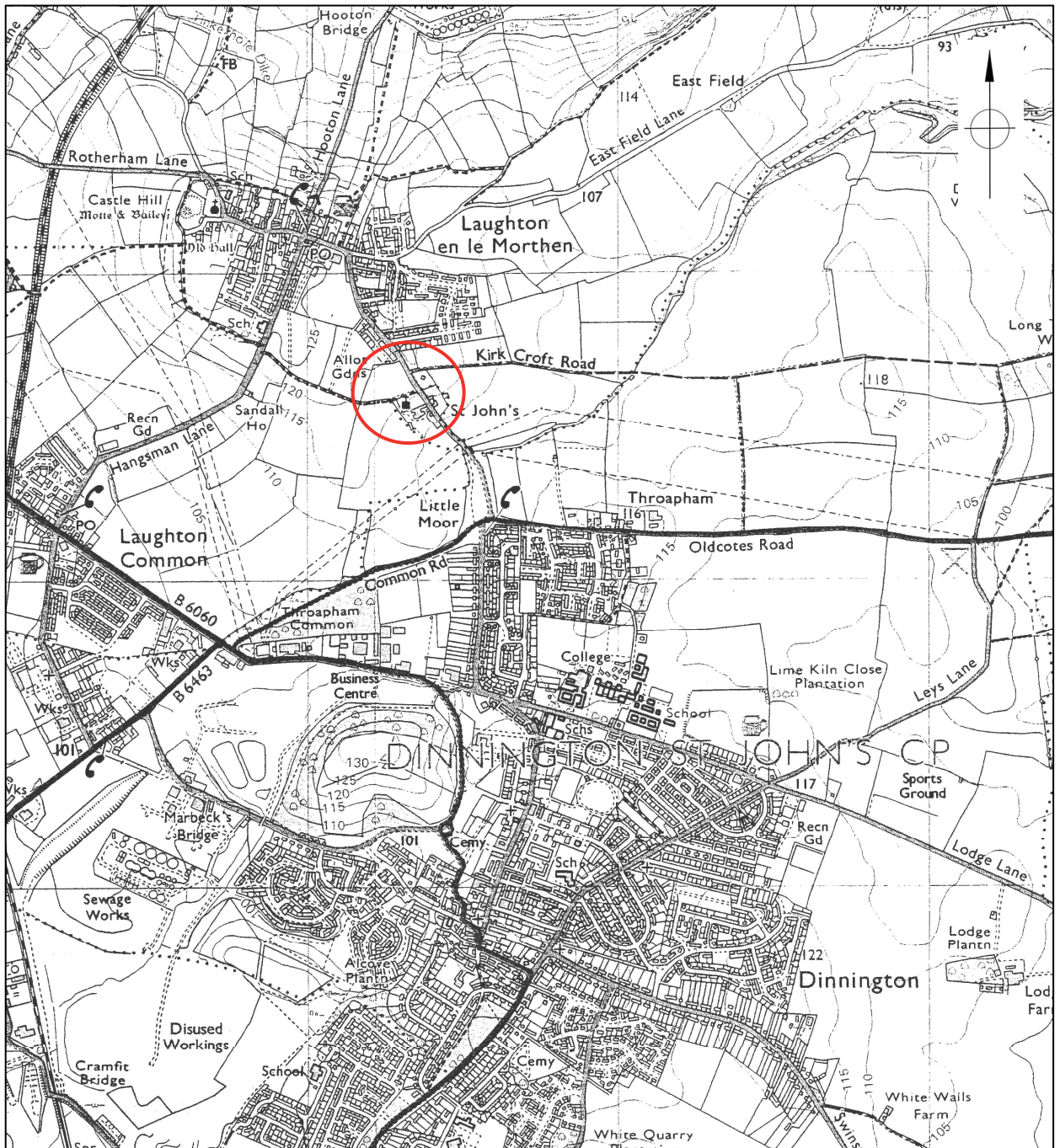
IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists) 2001 *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

Ryder, P 1982 *Saxon Churches in South Yorkshire* (South Yorkshire County Archaeology Monograph No 2)

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

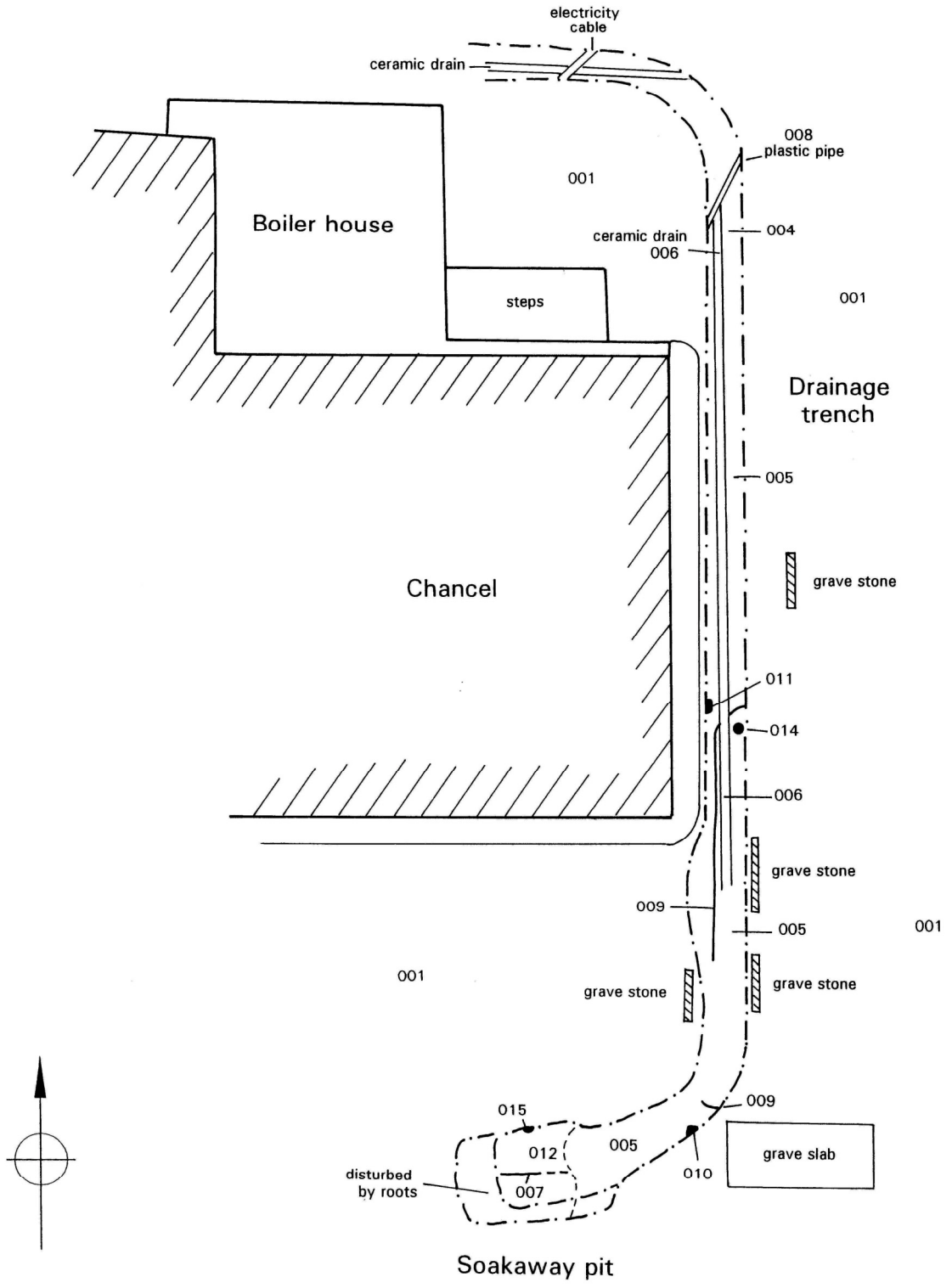
8.1 The archaeological watching brief at St John's church was commissioned and funded by the Churches Conservation Trust. EDAS would like to thank the Trust, in particular their Conservation Manager, Dawn Whitton, and the church architect, Robert Mortimer of Wiles and Maguire Ltd, for their co-operation in carrying out the archaeological work.

8.2 The watching brief was carried out by Kate Dennett, on behalf of EDAS, and she produced a draft archive and took the site photographs. The final report was produced by Ed Dennison, with whom the responsibility for any errors remains.



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PROJECT		ST JOHN'S CHURCH, THROAPHAM	
TITLE		GENERAL LOCATION	
SCALE	NTS	DATE	MAY 2009
EDAS		FIGURE	1



PROJECT	
ST JOHN'S CHURCH, THROAPHAM	
TITLE	
RESULTS OF WATCHING BRIEF	
SCALE	DATE
AS SHOWN	MAY 2009
EDAS	FIGURE
	2



Plate 1: Trench excavation in progress, looking S.



Plate 2: Excavated drainage trench, looking N.



Plate 3: South side of soakaway pit, showing root damage, looking S.



Plate 4: Burial 014 in base of drainage trench, looking S.

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONTEXTS

- 001 Rough vegetation and loose dark brown silty top soil 0.09m thick.
- 002 Firm dark red ash with occasional pieces of clinker, up to 0.22m thick.
- 003 Layer of firm creamy grey fine crushed limestone/gravel, up to 0.04m thick.
- 004 Mixed yellow/mid-brown loam and silty clay, with occasional fragments of slate and stone - backfill of earlier pipe trench.
- 005 Friable light brown fine silty soil/clay - background soil of churchyard?
- 006 Glazed ceramic drain, 0.13m wide and 0.48m BGL, running north-south, apparently disused.
- 007 Short possible east-west aligned linear grave cut.
- 008 Plastic drain pipe (in use, draining NE corner of chancel).
- 009 Metal water pipe (disused), 0.49m BGL, within 004.
- 010 Corner of limestone or alabaster structure, fine creamy white, roughly dressed, 0.3m BGL and 0.68m high, possibly part of vault.
- 011 Two small limestone pieces, c.0.18m x 0.1m, in base of main trench.
- 012 Friable mid-brown loamy soil, with occasional small fragments of stone, infill of 007?
- 013 Very firm yellow/brown silty clay - presumed natural.
- 014 Possible disturbed in situ burial (skull, sternum, clavicle), extended and aligned east-west, c.1.0m BGL.
- 015 Skull exposed in north side of soakaway pit.

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Location : DINNINGTON ST JOHNS, ROTHERHAM, SOUTH YORKSHIRE
IoE number : 335754
Date listed : 15 OCT 1986
Date of last amendment : 15 OCT 1986

SE58NW
2/8
5.6.68

ST JOHN'S ROAD
(west side)
Church of St. John

I

Church now redundant and undergoing restoration. C12 origin, nave of several medieval builds, C15 tower, chancel and porch rebuilt 1709, C19 restoration. Ashlar limestone, stainless steel roofs, slated aisle roofs. West tower, 3-bay aisled nave with south porch, 2-bay chancel. Tower: 3 stages, Perpendicular style. Chamfered plinth and wave-moulded band; diagonal west buttresses flank blocked west door having quadrant-moulded arch and hood-mould; similar surround to cusped 3-light west window. String courses between stages, 2-light belfry openings with hood moulds. Embattled parapet with waterspouts and head-carved gargoyles to north. Nave: wave-moulded band continues at rebuilt west end. Gabled porch to bay 1 has pointed arch with impost and hoodmould, gable copings; resited C12 arch to south door within has shafts with carved capitals and 2-order arch with hoodmould; small effigial carving in east wall, cross-slab with shears in west wall. South aisle lit by two C19 double-chamfered windows with cusped ogee lights beneath square heads, buttress to right of each. C15 clerestorey with three 3-light windows having cusped lights beneath Tudor arches, tracery of bays 2 and 3 undergoing replacement at time of resurvey. String course beneath parapet with roll-moulded copings. North aisle has plain, chamfered, 2-light window and ashlar copings; blind clerestorey. Chancel: lower. Keel-moulded string course rises over C19, shouldered-arched, priest's door; two 2-light widows with ogee lights beneath square heads. C19 east window of 3 lights with panel tracery beneath segmental arch. Keel-moulded string course beneath parapet as nave, shallow east gable. North aisle overlaps chancel and has small 2-light window and octagonal stack.

Interior: tower arch has eastern broach-stops to chamfered jambs, cavetto-moulded inner order to arch. Arcades of c1200 with cylindrical piers having octagonal abaci to north and circular abaci to south, keeled south-east respond with shafts; bowtel-moulded arches of 2 orders, arches of a further western bay now truncated by C15 tower. At west end of north aisle a blocked, chamfered arch abuts the tower. Chancel arch as aisles. C14 double-chamfered arch from chancel into north aisle chapel has head-carved corbels. Nave roof probably C15 with bosses to cambered tie beams, C19 chancel roof. Font: octagonal, Perpendicular with traceried panels and castellated top. Grave slabs in floor: C15 cross slab with English inscription; another slab in chancel dated 1633; several others with C17 and C18 dates. Remarkable coped grave cover (now in 2 pieces) has foliage carved in high relief (illustrated in Ryder, p98). The church originally served the parishes of Throapham, Letwell and Gildingwells but is now incorporated in the civil parish of Dinnington St John's.

P Ryder, Saxon Churches in South Yorkshire, South Yorks County Council County Archaeology Monograph No 2, 1982, (pp97, 98).

Detailed survey report in South Yorkshire Ancient Monuments and Sites Record, Sheffield, Primary Index No 278.

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

APPENDIX 3



BRIEF FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING (Watching Brief)

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 The accompanying planning report outlines the known or suspected archaeological implications of development on the development site.

1.2 There is reason to believe that archaeological remains may be disturbed in the course of the proposed development, though little is known of their nature or state of preservation.

1.3 Archaeological monitoring (often referred to as a 'Watching Brief') is required to ensure that remains that are affected can be recorded and/or retrieved.

1.4 All archaeological work will be monitored by the South Yorkshire Archaeology Service (SYAS).

2 FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

2.1 The work shall be carried out by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Details of staff numbers, their relative experience and their responsibilities in carrying out the work should be submitted to SYAS in advance of work starting. Staff c.v.'s should be included, unless already supplied to SYAS in previous project specifications.

2.2 Reasonable prior notice (at least 14 days) of the commencement of the development is to be given to the archaeological contractor. A minimum of one week's notice of the commencement of fieldwork must be given by the archaeological contractor to SYAS, to arrange monitoring visits.

2.3 Access to the site must be afforded to the developer's nominated archaeological contractor at all reasonable times.

2.4 All groundworks associated with the construction of foundations, service trenches, etc., must be undertaken under archaeological supervision, to allow for the identification and recording of any archaeological material that might be uncovered.

2.5 Where structures, features or finds of archaeological interest are exposed or disturbed by construction works, the archaeological contractor must be given the opportunity to observe, clean, assess and, where appropriate, hand excavate, sample and record these features and finds.

2.6 Any human remains which are revealed must initially be left *in situ* and, if removal is necessary, this must comply with the relevant Ministry of Justice (formerly Home Office), Diocesan and other regulations, as appropriate.

2.7 All finds that are 'treasure' (in terms of the Treasure Act 1997) will be reported to the Coroner and appropriate procedures then followed.

2.8 Heavy plant or excavators must not be operated in the immediate vicinity of archaeological remains until the remains have been recorded and the archaeological contractor on site has given explicit permission for operations to recommence at that location.

2.9 Where archaeological remains are observed by contractors or plant operators, they must immediately notify the archaeological contractor.

2.10 If it becomes clear during the monitoring that little of archaeological interest is likely to survive on the site, the contractor should discuss their work with the monitor. A joint decision will be made on reducing the work to an intermittent watching brief or ceasing observation of groundworks.

3 ARCHIVE

3.1 Upon completion of fieldwork, any samples taken will be processed and all finds will be cleaned, identified, assessed, spot-dated and properly stored.

3.2 A field archive will be compiled, comprising all primary written documents, plans, sections and photographs.

3.3 The field archive should be deposited with the appropriate museum or other archive (specified in the accompanying planning report). The archaeological contractor must contact the archive at the beginning of the project to arrange this and then to discuss conservation issues identified during the project.

4 REPORT & PUBLICITY

4.1 A report will be produced to include the following:

- background information
- a summary of the works carried out
- a description and interpretation the findings
- an assessment of the importance of the archaeology found

4.2 All excavated areas must be accurately mapped with respect to nearby fixed structures and roads, and all archaeological features should be illustrated with appropriately scaled plans and sections. The report should be appropriately illustrated, including all of the following (unless agreed otherwise):

- a detailed location map
- a site plan showing all identified features of archaeological interest
- if possible, phase plans should be produced
- detailed plans and sections of features

- a selection of scanned photographs of work in progress
- select artefact illustrations

4.3 A printed and bound copy of the report must be supplied to SYAS for incorporation into the South Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record. A digital copy of the report must also be supplied.

4.4 Acceptable digital formats are:

- text (Word and ASCII);
- images (.JPG at no less than 300 dpi. resolution).

4.5 A summary report of an appropriate length, accompanied by illustrations, must be prepared and submitted in digital format, for publication in the appropriate volume of *Archaeology in South Yorkshire*.

4.6 Provision must be made for publicising the results of the work locally, e.g. by presenting a paper at South Yorkshire Archaeology Day and talking to local societies.

4.7 The archaeological contractor must complete the online OASIS form at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis/>.

South Yorkshire Archaeology Service

Prepared: April 2005

Revised: July 2005