

St. John the Baptist Church, Doncaster Road, Hooton
Roberts, South Yorkshire

National Grid Reference: SK 4840 9705 (centred)

Archaeological Watching Brief

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Fieldwork

Helen Holderness

Reporting

Helen Holderness

Illustrations

Helen Holderness

Archive

Linzi Harvey

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OASIS SUMMARY FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
OASIS identifier	Arcus2-49317	
Project title	St John the Baptist Church, Hooton Roberts	
Short description of the project	A watching brief was carried out during the laying on new electrical cables for lighting within the churchyard. The church dates to the Norman period and the graveyard has been used for burials since the Medieval period. No known graves were disturbed but some human bone was recovered from the trench line. This had been previously disturbed and the bones were reburied after the trench had been excavated. A large iron key and a metal coffin handle was also recovered and were analysed by specialists.	
Project dates	18-08-2008 to 19-09-2008	
Previous/future work	none	
Monument type and period	Churchyard Medieval and later periods	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	Ornate iron key and metal coffin handle – post medieval	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County/Parish	South Yorkshire, Hooton Roberts	
Site address	St John the Baptist Church, Doncaster Road, Hooton Roberts, South Yorkshire	
Site co-ordinates	SK 4840 9705	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	ARCUS	
Project brief originator	SYAS	
Project design originator	Katherine Baker	
Project supervisor	Helen Holderness	
Project manager	Richard O'Neill	
Sponsor or funding body	Hooton Roberts, Parochial Church Council	
PROJECT ARCHIVES		
Archive Type	Location/Accession no.	Content (e.g. pottery, metalwork, etc)
Physical	Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham	Metal finds
Paper	South Yorkshire SMR	report, context sheets, plans, sections, photographs
Digital	South Yorkshire SMR	pdf copy of report
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	An Archaeological Watching Brief at St John the Baptist Church, Doncaster Road, Hooton Roberts, South Yorkshire	
Report no	1230	
Author	Helen Holderness	
Date	December 2008	

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND PLATES

Illustrations

- 1 Site location
- 2 Plan of proposed external floodlighting

Plates

- 1 Trench to the west of the church
- 2 Trench to the south of the church
- 3 Trench to the east of the church
- 4 Trench to the north of the church
- 5 Trench where it met the northeast wall
- 6 Scar of building against the north wall of the tower
- 7 Sandstone block [101]
- 8 Backfilled trench to south of the church
- 9 Coffin grip from [100]
- 10 Iron key from [100]

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

In September 2008 ARCUS were commissioned by Hooton Roberts Parochial Church Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of floodlighting at St John the Baptist Church, Hooton Roberts, South Yorkshire (centred on SK 4840 9705).

South Yorkshire Archaeology Service (SYAS) requested the watching brief due to the historical nature of the church.

A trench approximately 0.35m deep by 0.30m wide was excavated around the church. Much of the trench was confined to the edges of the footpaths to minimise ground disturbance. During the archaeological monitoring the footings of a stone structure were uncovered to the northwest of the tower. Broken and disarticulated bones were recovered from the trench along the south and east frontages. A corroded, metal key and a corroded coffin handle were also recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

ARCUS were commissioned by Hooton Roberts Parochial Church Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of floodlighting at St John the Baptist Church, Doncaster Road, Hooton Roberts, South Yorkshire (centred SK 4840 9705) (**Illustration 1**).

The work was undertaken in line with the guidelines laid out in PPG16 (Department of Environment 1990). This document details the aims and methodologies of the archaeological fieldwork, in addition to the results of the watching brief.

1.1 Site Location and Land Use

The site lies in the heart of the hamlet of Hooton Roberts and is centred on SK 4840 9705 within the churchyard of St John the Baptist church.

The underlying geology is sandstone with clay.

1.2 Historical Background

St John the Baptist church is of Norman origin dating back to the 12th century. The north wall of the nave, the inner arch of the door and the arch to the south chancel chapel are all 12th-century features, with additions having been made in the 14th and 18th centuries. Medieval grave slabs held in the church testify to the length of time that the churchyard has been used for burials.

2 AIMS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to:

- identify any archaeological remains within the electricity cable trenches;
- record all archaeological remains disturbed by the site works;
- recover artefacts disturbed by the site works;
- record any human remains disturbed by the site works and minimise the disturbance of any burials uncovered;
- produce an accurate and comprehensive record and report on the archaeology disturbed by the site works.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork Programme

The watching brief was conducted by Helen Holderness, ARCUS Project Archaeologist on 18th and 19th September 2008. The trench was cut and excavated by hand by the contractors and the approximate location is shown on the site plan (**Illustration 2**). All groundworks were monitored and sufficient time was given to assess the presence of archaeological features and to record the features where they occurred.

The location of the trench was chosen to minimise ground disturbance to the churchyard and kept to the edges of the footpaths, but not on the footpaths, where possible. Existing and obvious graves, those with marker stones or mounded soil, were avoided when the trench deviated away from the paths. None of the works were more than 0.45m deep with most of the cable trenches being 0.35m deep. The maximum depth for the concrete blocks was 0.15m.

The trench was backfilled at the end of each day's excavation and the turf reinstated.

3.2 Methodology for Recording Groundworks

All excavation and recording works were carried out in accordance with the methodologies outlined in the ARCUS project design (Baker 2008), with guidelines issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologist (IFA 2001) and with current industry best practice.

A full written summary and photographic record was made for the trench. Context numbers were issued to features within the trench.

All human bone that was disturbed was recovered, recorded and replaced after the cable had been laid, prior to backfilling in accordance with current guidelines issued by English Heritage and the Church of England. All other finds were collected and recorded.

A digital photographic record was made.

4 RESULTS

The trench was hand dug from the northwest corner of the church tower around the church to the northwest corner (**Plates 1-5**). It was a maximum of 0.30m wide and no more than 0.45m deep.

A single archaeological feature was exposed to the northwest of the church tower. A large sandstone block [101] (**Plate 7**) lay across the trench and continued on either side of the trench. This corresponded to a building scar observed on the north wall of the tower corresponded to a building scar (**Plate 6**) and was the possible foundation remains for an unknown structure.

No other features were uncovered. During the excavation disarticulated human remains were uncovered in the topsoil. These were not retained but were recorded and then reburied immediately within the cable trench. A large metal key and several items of coffin furniture were also found within the topsoil but were not associated with any features (see **Appendix 1**).

The trench was backfilled with the topsoil and the surface was checked to make sure that no fragments of bone were visible (**Plate 8**).

5 DISCUSSION

The excavation confirmed that the building scar on the north wall of the tower revealed the traces of a building. No dating evidence was found and there was no indication when the building was either constructed or removed.

The human remains were disarticulated. More remains were recovered from the south and east of the church than the west and north. Most of the bones were long bones, with several pieces of rib and vertebrae. Many of the bones showed signs of earlier damage done when they were previously disturbed, although a few were nicked during the trench excavation.

Since the bones were disarticulated and it is known that the graveyard has been in used for over 600 years no dates can be assigned to the bones uncovered.

The iron key (**Plate 10**) retrieved from the topsoil was found to the east of the church. It is similar in style to another recovered from Lincolnshire that was ascribed to the 17th or 18th century.

The coffin grip and plate (**Plate 9**) are common finds in cemeteries and graveyards and are relatively well documented. The embellishment of the coffin was established by the 17th century with many becoming more ornate into the 18th and 19th centuries. The one recovered from the topsoil to the south of the church has been assigned a date from the early 19th century. This was the location that recovered the most human remains but no coffin cut was seen.

The excavation revealed little that was not already known about the site. No grave cuts were encountered but this was due to the shallowness of the trench. Since the graveyard had been in use from at least the medieval period, the presence of human remains and coffin furniture was to be expected. The disarticulated remains are evidence of the burial activity which has taken place over the last few hundred years.

6 ARCHIVE

The project archive will be deposited with the Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham. A copy of this report will also be deposited as part of the archive.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, K. 2008 *Project Design for Archaeological Watching Brief at St John the Baptist Church, Hooton Roberts, South Yorkshire* Unpublished ARCUS report 1230.1(1)

Boyle, A., Boston, C. and Witkin, A. 2005 *The Archaeological Experience at St Luke's Church, Old Street, Islington*. Oxford Archaeology Press

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8 APPENIDIX 1 – SPEICALIST ARTEFACT REPORT

8.1 Metal Finds

By Diana Mahoney-Swales

The corroded remains of an iron key, grip and associated grip plate were recovered from context [100].

The key is 147 mm in length with a circular sectioned solid stem (10mm diameter). The last 22mm of the bit-end has a slightly smaller diameter (8mm) than the rest of the stem and the very end of this segment reduces further in diameter to 5mm. The stem extends beyond the bit. The bit is square (dimensions 28mm x 25 mm) with a single cleft cut at right angles to the stem. The cleft is square flanked by two lines, forming two teeth. The bow is essentially oval in shape, but the stem intrudes slightly into the inner circumference and the area of articulation between the bow and the stem is more flattened than the rest of the oval outline. The maximum internal diameter of the bow is 40mm x 26mm. The external dimensions of the bow are 50mm x 40mm (**Plate 10**). This key closely resembles a locking key recovered from Wellingore, Lincolnshire ascribed to the 17th and 18th centuries (Portable Antiquities Scheme). It is not possible to determine if it still possessed a functional purpose or was interred as a grave good within a burial.

The grip and grip plate are in full articulation. The grip is 125mm in length. It is composed of a horizontal bar of uniform thickness (7mm) with curved corners. This design corresponds with grip-type 2b from Christ Church Spitalfield's, providing a date range of 1763-1837 (Reeve and Adams 1993:144: microfiche 3). The dimensions of the grip plate are 185mm x 50mm. It is a plain geometric shape with square ends framing a poorly defined lozenge shaped body (**Plate 9**). No comparable grip plate was recorded for Christ Church Spitalfield's but a similar, almost identical, example is recorded for St Luke's, Old Street, Islington (OLR1). This grip plate is undated but is accompanied by grip type OLR4 which has been ascribed a date range of 1836-1847 (Boyle et al. 2005: Appendix I: Fig. 460).

The recovery of the grip and grip plate indicates the presence of post-medieval burials dating to the 18th and 19th century. It is possible that burials pre- and post-date the dates provided, as a single artefact can only indicate the date of one burial. Due to the availability of such coffin furnishings to all social and economic classes during the Victorian period it is difficult to extrapolate any further information from this artefact. However, if further excavation is undertaken at this site, it is paramount that any further furnishings recovered are fully recorded and receive specialist analysis in the bio-cultural context of the burials and the skeletal remains interred with them. Such analysis will enable a better understanding of burial provisioning in terms of social class and status within South Yorkshire, a hitherto understudied area. The items should be deposited with the relevant museum.

9 APPENDIX 2 – CONTEXT LIST

Context number	Context type	Description
100	Deposit	Topsoil – dark brown loamy
101	Structure	Sandstone block
102	Cut	Cut for [101]

10 ILLUSTRATIONS AND PLATES