

Archaeological Building Survey
of
ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH,
ST ANDREWS ROAD, AVONMOUTH, BRISTOL.
for
Ferris Homes



Report No. 2187/2009
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Bristol and Region Archaeological Services

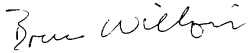

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Archaeological Building Survey
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ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH,
ST ANDREWS ROAD, AVONMOUTH, BRISTOL.

Centred on
N.G.R. ST 51794 78112

Client: Ferris Homes
Agent: David Cahill Design Consultants

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<i>Date Issued:</i>	September 18, 2009 

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NOTE

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September, 2009.

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SUMMARY

St Brendan's Roman Catholic Church, Avonmouth was recorded prior to its demolition for redevelopment of the site. Built of buff-coloured brick in the mid-1950s it had not seen any significant alteration before its closure in early 2004. There was an aisleless nave with a west gallery above a narthex, and a small south transept. Tiny side chapels were placed to either side of the chancel. There was an attached bell tower close to the north-west corner of the building. Some of the fittings, including the altar and font, had already been removed, but the 1950s decorative communion rail ironwork and narthex screen remained.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) were commissioned by David Cahill Design Consultants on behalf of Ferris Homes to undertake a Level 2 building survey of the former Roman Catholic St Brendan's Church at St Andrews Road, Avonmouth. The building survey was commissioned as a condition of planning consent for re-development of the site, which would involve demolition of the building (planning consent 08/03038/F).
- 1.2 The project was conducted in accordance with the methodology outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by BaRAS 2009.
- 1.3 Recording of the building was undertaken on 7th of September 2009 by John Bryant, MifA, who also wrote this report.
- 1.4 The project archive will be deposited with Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery under the Accession Number BRSMG 2009/69. The project has been entered in the Bristol Historic Environment Record as: BHER 24811 and has the OASIS identifier bristola1-64017. A digital copy of the report will be made available to the National Monuments Record maintained by English Heritage.

2. THE SITE

- 2.1 The site lies on the north-eastern side of St Andrews Road in the centre of Avonmouth village at NGR ST 51794 78112 (**Cover & Fig. 1**). It is bounded to the north-west by No. 2, a private dwelling, and to south-east and north-east by a Royal Mail depot. Surrounding the building on three sides are grounds planted with trees and shrubs, but the north-eastern end of the site is completely overgrown and, consequently, inaccessible.
- 2.2 St Brendan's Church itself occupies a footprint of approximately 270m² and is surrounded by grounds covering a further area of about 300m².
- 2.3 According to the British Geological Survey, the site lies on Estuarine Alluvium above Mercia Mudstone of the Triassic period. The site is level, at about 7.6m aOD.
- 2.4 This building is not Listed, nor is the site in a conservation area.

3. SURVEY OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The principle objectives of the survey were to make a photographic record of the building prior to its demolition and to record any structural changes and developments made to the building since its construction.
- 3.2 This survey was conducted to English Heritage level 2 which comprised of photographic recording of the building and production of a basic floor plan.
- 3.3 Due to the overgrown nature of the grounds, it was not possible to gain external access beyond the north nave wall or the south transept. Nothing was accessible internally beyond the priest's room or vestry, where the boiler room at least was assumed to be located.

4. GENERAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 No previous archaeological study of this site has been produced, although there have been several archaeological interventions in the Avonmouth area since the early 1990s.
- 4.2 This part of Avonmouth formerly lay within the detached tithing of Shirehampton, part of the ancient parish of Westbury-on-Trym. Until 1904 this was part of the County of Gloucestershire, but was then absorbed into the City and County of Bristol. Shirehampton village itself lay 2 kms to the south-east of the present site.
- 4.3 Sturge's 1817 parish map showed that the line of Avonmouth Road was already in existence. This site lay close to the upper end of Broad Pill, an inlet on the northern bank of the River Avon. The 1817 map showed a feature north of the road and aligned approximately parallel to it, with field boundaries running off at right angles. Many of the fields had straight edges, suggesting enclosure at a relatively recent date. The larger-scale OS 1:2500 plan, surveyed in about 1880, shows the feature as a wide drain, or rhine, with a bank along its southern edge, periodically marked by a stone. Both the drain and the bank ran beneath the footprint of the present church building. The Third Edition OS 1:2500 plan, revised shortly before the First World War, recorded St Andrews Road for the first time, with Nos. 2 and 4 already built.
- 4.4 In 1946 this site was purchased and a wooden church dedicated to St Brendan the navigator was erected, being formally blessed by Bishop Lee of Clifton later in the same year. This was a daughter church of St Bernard (R.C.) in Shirehampton. In 1955 the wooden church was dismantled and moved to Lawrence Weston for use as a scout hut. The present St Brendan's Church was built in 1955-56, blessed by Bishop Rudderham in January of the latter year. Buff brick was used for the exterior, with single Roman tiles for the roof.
- 4.5 St Brendan was established as a separate parish in 1973, but congregations later declined, and the church was closed in early 2004, the final Mass being heard on Sunday 1st February.

5. THE BUILDING SURVEY

- 5.1 St Brendan's Church is constructed in a Romanesque style, in buff brickwork with stone dressings and with single Roman clay roof tiles (**Cover & Plates 1-2**). It appears to be all of one construction with no subsequent alterations (**Fig. 2**). The main building is approximately 22.7m in length and 12.1m wide; there is a small bell tower (approximately 45 feet/13.7m in height) adjoining the west end of the north wall. Although the building is aligned south-west to north-east, the following description uses the liturgical points of the compass.
- 5.2 The main entrance is at the west end, through double doors beneath a canopied porch supported by two columns (**Plates 3 & 4**). Higher in the wall is a circular window. Short screen walls extend to either side of the front, each containing a small, empty niche in its front elevation (**Plate 5**). Inside the front doors is a tile-floored narthex with double iron doors in the centre of an ironwork screen that sits on low brick walls (**Plate 6**). Both doors and screen include zigzagging ironwork that may represent the crown of thorns, while each door has a centrepiece comprising three multiple arcs, representing the Holy Trinity (**Plates 3, 7 & 8**). Pairs of wooden doors lead off the narthex to north and south: beyond the doors are apse-ended spaces, that to the south being the baptistry (the font is missing, **Plate 9**) and that to the north housing the stairs up to the gallery. The staircase has a steel frame with wooden treads and open risers, approached by five straight steps but then comprising winders (**Plate 10**). A single window, splayed internally, lights the bottom of the stairs. At the opposite side of the building, but at higher level, is another circular window. The gallery above the narthex also spans above the base of the staircase to provide access to a hatch into the upper part of the tower, but at the opposite end, stops short of the upper part of the baptistry (**Plate 11**).
- 5.3 The nave measures approximately 14.5m by 9m and is lit by three round-headed windows in both north and south walls (**Plates 12-15**). Parquet flooring extends throughout both the nave and chancel. Walls are mostly plastered but the brickwork against the narthex is unrendered, as is the area beneath the tower and also the brick piers supporting the chancel arch. Each side wall is 4.40m in height from floor to roof: pairs of hooks at intervals indicate where the Stations of the Cross were formerly located. At the eastern end of the north wall is the side entrance, with the confessionals immediately to its west, the priest's booth lit by a small window (**Plates 16 & 17**). On the opposite side of the nave is a small south transept, lit by a circular window high in its south wall (**Plate 18**). The nave is open to the roof, exposing the A-frame trusses. All single doors in both nave and chancel are round-headed
- 5.4 Terminating the eastern end of the nave are triple brick arches, the larger, middle one framing the view of the chancel (**Plate 19**). South of the chancel is a small, shallow side chapel with an arched recess in its rear wall (**Plate 18**), while a similar space at the northern end acts as a vestibule outside the vestry (**Plate 20**). The communion rail extends the width of the church at this point, occupying all three arches: the ironwork beneath the rail includes roundels, each containing a Christian symbol (**Plates 21-28**). A window with three round-headed lights takes up almost the full width of the south chancel wall (**Plate 29**); the opposite wall has a doorway into the vestry at one end and a date-stone at the other (**Plate 30**). Curiously, the stone is carved with the date MCMLIV, even though construction is said not to have begun until the following year (**Plate 31**). Although the altar has been removed, the stepped base against the blank east wall survives, as does the canopy suspended from the ceiling above (**Plates 32 & 33**).
- 5.5 A simple pitched roof covers most of the building, extended above the side entrance. There are small gabled side roofs over the baptistry and transept on the south side and above the gallery stairs in the north-west corner. The tower has a pyramidal roof. Flat roofing was used for the vestry and boiler room and above the confessionals.

5.6 Comparison with other 1950s Roman Catholic churches in north and north-west Bristol (e.g. Our Lady of the Rosary, Kingsweston; St Vincent de Paul, Southmead) shows that, although each is individually designed, there may be something of a family resemblance. Perhaps most especially the positioning of the bell tower close to the west end of the north wall. While no architect has been identified for this building, it is not impossible that the same hand was at work in other local examples. St Brendan's certainly appears no more significant than any of the others in architectural terms. The decorative ironwork and its symbolism appears to be contemporary 1950s artwork.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The survey comprised a floor plan and a photographic record of the building, inside and out, although the rear room(s) was inaccessible and close examination of some elevations was not possible. It was determined that no obvious structural change had occurred since its construction in 1955-56. The building was found to be typical of its type and of no especial architectural significance, although the surviving decorative ironwork could be of historic artistic value.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Maps and Drawings

Ordnance Survey	1953	1:1250 plan
Ordnance Survey	2008	1:1250 plan

Un-published material

BaRAS 2009	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Building Recording at St Brendan's Church, Avonmouth, Bristol.</i>
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8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BaRAS would like to thank David Cahill Design Consultants for their cooperation.

APPENDIX 1: Policy Statement

This report is the result of work carried out in the light of national and local authority policies.

NATIONAL POLICIES

Statutory protection for archaeology is enshrined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979), amended by the National Heritage Act, 1983. Nationally important sites are listed in the Schedule of Ancient Monuments (SAM). Scheduled Monument consent is required for any work which would affect a SAM.

ODPM PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

The Planning Policy Guidance of Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16) consolidates advice to planning authorities. The Guidance stresses the non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource, details the role of the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), encourages early consultation with county and district archaeological officers and sets out the requirement for developers to provide sufficient information on the archaeological impact of development to enable a reasonable planning decision to be made.

PPG 16 also indicates the circumstances where further work would be necessary and outlines the use of agreements and conditions to protect the archaeological resource.

DISTRICT POLICY

Bristol City Council Supplementary Planning Document (2006) states (policy SPD No.7, p4):

- (i) There will be a presumption in favour of preserving any archaeological features or sites of national importance, whether scheduled or not.
- (ii) Development which could adversely affect sites, structures, landscapes or buildings of archaeological interest and their settings will require an assessment of the archaeological resource through a desktop study, and where appropriate a field evaluation. Where there is evidence of archaeological remains, development will not be permitted except where it can be demonstrated that the archaeological features of the site will be satisfactorily preserved in situ, or a suitable strategy has been put forward to mitigate the impact of development proposals upon important archaeological remains and their settings; or, if this is not possible and the sites are not scheduled or of national importance, provision for adequately recording the site prior to destruction is made, preferably by negotiating a planning agreement to ensure that access, time and financial resources are available to allow essential recording and publication to take place.

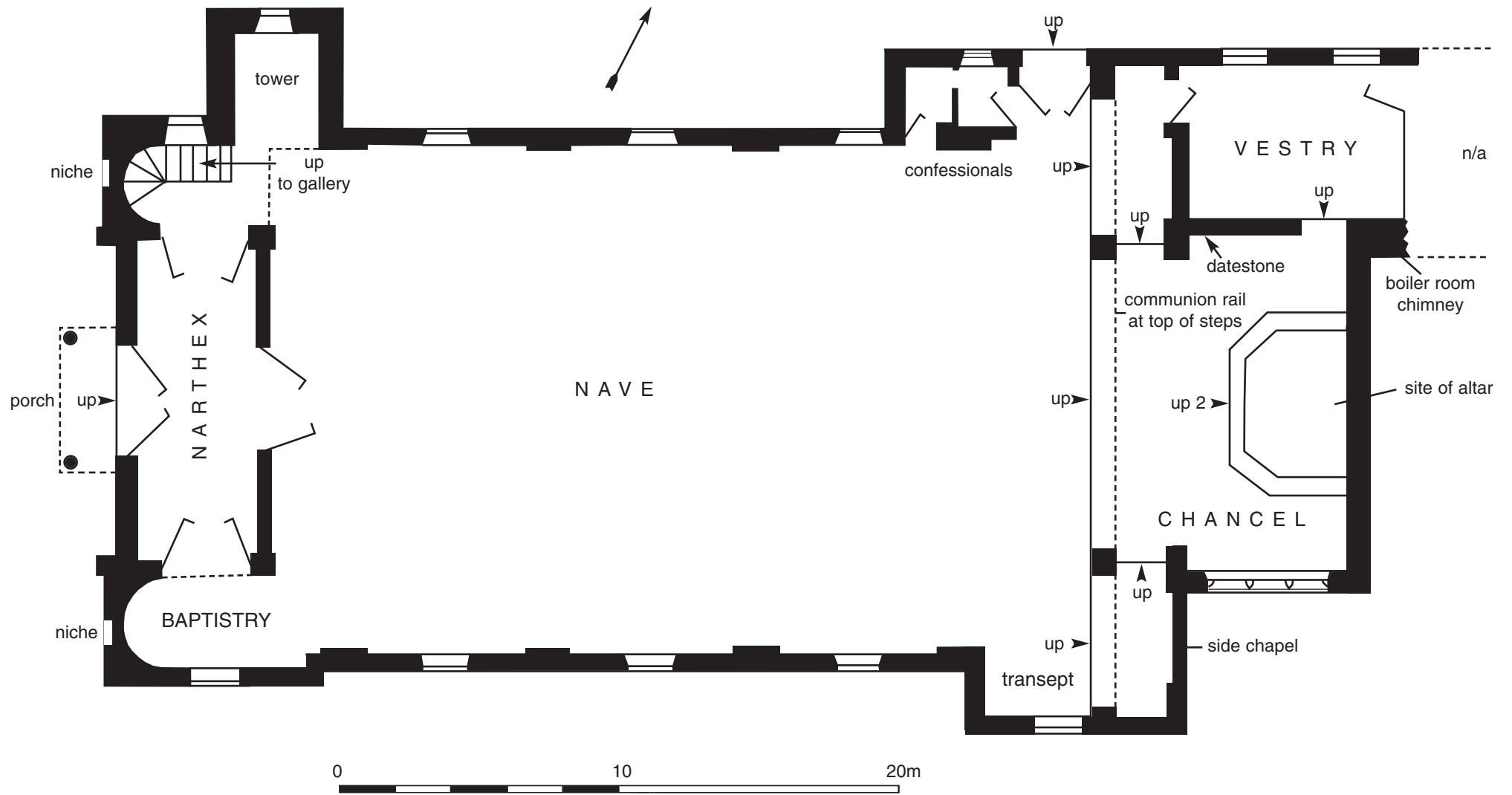


Fig.2 Ground floor plan of church, 2009, scale 1:200



Plate 1 North elevation, seen from St Brendan's Way



Plate 2 East end, seen from Royal Mail depot yard



Plate 3 Main entrance and view through narthex



Plate 4 Tympanum and underside of porch canopy



Plate 5 Niche in wall to north of entrance



Plate 6 Interior of narthex, looking south



Plate 7 Narthex screen - detail of zig-zag ironwork



Plate 8 Narthex screen doors - detail of multiple triple arcs



Plate 9 Baptistry, looking west



Plate 10 Gallery staircase, looking west



Plate 11 West gallery and narthex beneath, from east



Plate 12 View eastwards from gallery



Plate 13 View westwards from chancel towards gallery and narthex



Plate 14 South wall of nave, looking south-west



Plate 15 North wall of nave, looking north-west



Plate 16 Confessionals and side entrance, from south-east



Plate 17 Priests' booth in confessional



Plate 18 South transept and side chapel, from north-east



Plate 19 Chancel arch and side arches



Plate 20 Side entrance, vestry door and possible north side chapel



Plate 21 Communion rail ironwork - gates leading to vestry



Plate 22 Communion rail - adjoining gates to vestry



Plate 23 Communion rail ironwork - chancel arch, north end



Plate 24 Communion rail ironwork - chancel arch, north of step



Plate 25 Communion rail ironwork - chancel arch, south of step



Plate 26 Communion rail ironwork - chancel arch, south end



Plate 27 Communion rail ironwork - southern arch, north end



Plate 28 Communion rail ironwork, southern arch, south end

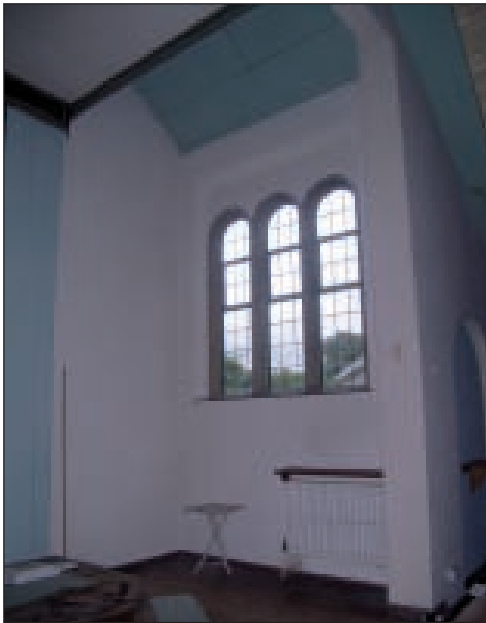


Plate 29 Chancel south wall and window, looking south-east



Plate 30 Chancel north wall, looking north-east



Plate 31 Date-stone



Plate 32 Site of altar, looking east



Plate 33 Canopy above altar