Archaeological Watching Brief

at

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH, CHURCH LANE, MIDSOMER NORTON, B&NES.

for

Parochial Church Council of St John the Baptist Church

Report No. 2419/2011

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Centred on
N.G.R. ST 66260 54191

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Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini	Km	Kilometre
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum	m	Metre
BaRAS	Bristol & Region Archaeological Services	NGR	National Grid Reference
BC	Before Christ	NMR	National Monuments Record
c.	Circa	OS	Ordnance Survey
HER	Historic Environment Record		

NOTE
Notwithstanding that Bristol and Region Archaeological Services have taken reasonable care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

March, 2011.

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out to monitor foundation trench excavations associated with the construction of a new organ loft and repositioning of the font within the Church of St John the Baptist, Midsomer Norton. Evidence for disturbance caused by the rebuilding of the nave in the 1830s was revealed in the stratigraphic sequence below floor level. A soak-away chamber beneath the font was recorded and fragments of disarticulated human bone were retrieved and re-interred within the church. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during the intrusive groundworks.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

Plates

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) were commissioned by Trevor Eastell of EG Design Ltd on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of St John the Baptist Church, Midsomer Norton, to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor hand excavation of trenches associated with reordering works within the church. The monitored works comprised footings for a mezzanine organ loft as well as a new soak-away pit for repositioning of the font. The works were carried out by Ellis and Co.Ltd., of Shepton Mallet.

1.2 Two investigative trial pits were excavated close to the western supporting columns of the nave in 2008. No significant archaeological features were observed in these pits although fragments of disarticulated human bone were present. It was suggested at the time, by the monitoring archaeologist, that the rebuilding of the church *c*1830 would have caused major disturbance and more scattered remains were likely to be found beneath the floor of the nave.

1.3 The Diocesan Advisory Committee issued a faculty under Church of England jurisdiction for the proposed reordering works. Alterations to church fabric do not require a formal Planning Application but must comply with the conditions of Building Regulations (Application number 10/00809). Human remains encountered during the course of the works would be re-interred within the same consecrated ground.

1.4 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS 2010) between January 10th and March 1st 2011 under the supervision of Andy King and Raymond Ducker, who also compiled this report. The illustrations were prepared by Ann Linge. The archive was compiled and prepared for deposition by the author and the project was managed by John Bryant.

1.5 The project archive will be donated to the Roman Baths Museum and Pump House under the Accession Number BATRM 2011.4. A digital copy of the report will be made available to the National Monuments Record in Swindon maintained by English Heritage. The project has been assigned the OASIS Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations as: bristola1-91222 and will be entered into the Bath & N. E Somerset Historic Environment Record.

2. THE SITE

2.1 Midsomer Norton in the Civil Parish of Norton Radstock is situated about 10 miles south-west of Bath and lies in the valley of the River Somer, which gives the town the latter part of its name. The church of St John the Baptist (centred on NGR ST 66260 54191) is located at the western end of the historic town (**Fig.1**). The churchyard is bounded by Church Square to the east, High Street to the south and Church Lane to the west. A community centre and car park, residential properties and The Moody Goose hotel lie to the north of the church.

2.2 In plan the site occupies a total area of about 3120m², although the groundworks covered by this report are limited to the western end of the nave (**Fig.2**). To the east of the churchyard, at the junction of High Street and Church Square, a spot height is recorded as 89.4m aOD. The internal floor of the nave would be approximately 1.5m above this.

2.3 The British Geological Survey map (*Bristol Region* 1:63,360, 1967) designates the underlying geology of the site area as Mercia Mudstone of the Triassic period.

2.4 The Church is a Grade II* Listed Building and lies within the Midsomer Norton and Welton designated Conservation Area. The Moody Goose Hotel, to the north of the church, is reportedly one of the oldest buildings in Midsomer (and Somerset) with origins going back to circa 1152 A.D. There are also a number of Grade II Listed structures in the vicinity.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 No formal archaeological fieldwork has been carried out within the church, although two engineering trial pits were observed in 2008.

3.2 According to the Extensive Urban Survey for Norton Radstock, (La Trobe-Bateman 1999) the prehistoric archaeology in the area is "extremely interesting", with both Bronze Age and Iron Age sites in the vicinity. The major Roman road known as the Fosse Way ran about a kilometre away and there is known Romano-British activity in the area.

3.3 Little is known for the period between the 5th century AD and there is no entry for Norton in the Domesday Survey. However, place-name evidence suggests that settlement may have existed by 1086. The manor of Norton was granted by William the Conqueror to Geoffrey de Montbray, bishop of Coutances, and Norton was held under him by Ulveva. From about 1150 until 1300 the manor was held by Alured de Lincoln. From 1387 the manor was held by the family of Thomas West, 1st Baron West and his descendants. Norton lay in the Chewton Hundred, forming part of the royal estate of Chewton. Little is known about medieval Norton, but there was a charter for a fair in the 13th century. The settlement was probably nucleated. It was only with the exploitation of coal resources in the area from the mid 18th century that the village saw major change. In 1791 Collinson described the village as containing 290 houses and upwards of 1,500 inhabitants. A century later there were 3,305 people living in the village.

3.4 The site is located in the historic heart of the medieval village and comprises the parish church of Saint John The Baptist. The street name of High Street is strongly indicative of this being the principal thoroughfare, and indeed the street is on the main route between the parish church (west) and the settlements of Radstock and Welton (to the east and north-east respectively). Cartographic evidence from the 1808 Ordnance Survey (OSD) map shows the settlement clustered along High Street, Silver Street and The Island. Apart from church and a converted tithe barn, most of the Listed buildings in this part of the village date from the 18th or 19th centuries or later.

3.5 The lower part of the church tower dates from the 15th century, the upper parts are 17th century, whilst the aisled nave was rebuilt in the 1830s. The Chancel and Lady Chapel are of 20th-century date. A few internal monuments also date from the 17th century. Collinson described the building as "*a very ancient edifice, as is evident from the circular arched doorways with uncouth zigzag mouldings and other such decorations*". Currently the Church is still used as a place of worship.

4. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 The fieldwork complied with the methodology contained within the Written Scheme of Investigation for this project (BaRAS 2010) and was conducted in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* issued by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 2008). The aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features or deposits revealed during the course of intrusive groundworks and to retrieve disarticulated human bone.

4.2 The watching brief involved monitoring contractors' hand excavation of five foundation pits for construction of a mezzanine organ loft and stairs. A further pit was excavated to provide a new soakaway for the repositioned church font (**Fig.3**). Part of the flagstone floor of the western end of the church nave was lifted and the bedding material removed to accomplish this.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

This trench was excavated to a depth of 1.3m against the north aisle wall of the church to provide a footing for the mezzanine loft staircase (**Fig. 3 & Plate 1**). A layer of dark red silty clay (107) containing lenses of white mortar and small stones was sealed by a deposit of compacted white mortar and rubble (106) that clearly sloped away from the wall of the church. Deposit 106 was in turn sealed by a mixed layer of mortar, rubble and clay (103) immediately underneath the bedding for two layers of limestone slabs forming the aisle floor (102, 101). No finds were recorded in this pit, it may be the case that deposit 106 was associated with the 1830s rebuilding of the church.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 abutted the western wall of the nave and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3 m. A similar sequence of deposits to those in trench 1 were observed. A 0.65m depth of red clay containing moderate inclusions of white mortar flecks and stone rubble (207) was sealed by a lens of white mortar up to 0.1m in depth (206). Two more mixed deposits of interbedded clay, stone and white mortar rubble (204, 205) up to 0.48m in depth were in turn sealed by the slab floor of the nave (203). The stepped, northern footing of the western archway of the nave contained a piece of re-used faced stone, other than this, nothing of any archaeological significance was observed (**Plate 2**).

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3m adjacent to the southernmost supporting column of the northern side of the nave (C5 on plan, see **Fig.3, Plate 3**). The lower stratigraphic sequence largely mirrored that revealed in trenches 1 and 2 namely up to 0.55m of redeposited, reddish-brown, silty-clays with inclusions of lime-mortar flecks and stones (305, 303). These deposits sealed the lower courses of Column C5, which comprised a rounded footing that may be evidence of pre-1830s construction beneath a stepped, square base (308). In addition, at the eastern end of the trench, on a north-south alignment and adjoining the rounded footing, were the remains of a wall 0.5m in width (306), extending beyond the limits of the trench and sealed by deposit 305.

On a similar alignment at the western edge of this trench, the remains of a badly damaged culvert (304) up to 0.25m in width had been cut through deposit 305.

Overlying 305 was 0.3m of compacted white mortar and stone rubble (302), dumped after the construction of the stepped column base and probably representative of the 1830s rebuild, sealed by 0.3m of mixed rubble, clay and mortar (301). The floor of the nave comprised a double surface of Lias Limestone slabs.

5.4 Trench 4

This trench abutted the western wall of the nave and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1m. The stratigraphic sequence revealed was almost identical to that recorded in trench 2 (**Plate 4**). Two fragments of a round column were recovered, though not retained, during the excavation of this trench. The larger of the column fragments had been reused as part of the bedding for the nave floor and may have come from the pre-1830s phase of the church.

5.5 Trench 5

This trench was excavated adjacent to Column C4 (see **Fig.3**) to a maximum depth of 1m and revealed a similar foundation of the column and sequence of deposits, to those described in trench 3 (see § 5.3 above).

5.6 The Font soak-away

Part of the project to create the new organ loft involved the relocation of the church font, from a position immediately north of Column C4 to a more central location between columns C4, C5 and the entrance to the church tower. On dismantling the pedestal of the font it was observed to have a centrally located hole within it, approximately 0.05m in diameter, which allowed the draining of water from the font. The drainage hole continued through the large, single piece, octagonal, Lias Limestone base of the font and the concrete slab below that. Upon removing the concrete slab a 0.5m wide shaft, lined with rough-hewn stone, was observed, which probably formed a sump for drainage (**Plate 6**). Only the upper courses of the stone shaft were bonded with greyish lime-mortar, the rest was placed stone, presumably for better drainage.

5.7 Trench 6

The trench for the new soak-away for the repositioned font was excavated to a depth of 0.72m below floor level. The stratigraphy followed the pattern seen in the other trenches of a dark red clay over 0.3m in depth, containing moderate inclusions of small stones, white mortar flecks, fragments of wall plaster, one fragment of clay tobacco-pipe stem and disarticulated human bone (601), underlying a mixed deposit of clay, mortar and rubble (600). More disarticulated human bone was retrieved from deposit 600 and reburied at the base of the new font soak-away (**Plate 6**).

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The results of the watching brief indicate that the 1830s rebuilding of the church had caused significant below-ground disturbance. The locations of trenches 1 to 5, adjacent to the church walls or columns, may have only revealed evidence for this disturbance, yet trench 6, some distance from standing walls, showed the same sequence of deposits to its excavated depth.

6.2 Traces of a wall footing and the remains of a culvert in trench 3 were probably associated with a phase of the church pre-dating the 1830s. Similarly, the large rounded footings, located beneath the squared, stepped footings of the fluted church columns may represent parts of an earlier phase of construction, surviving below the level of the present church building. The faced stone fragments, reused in the footings of the nave archway, observed in trench 2 also tend to support this idea. However, it is also possible that this stone came from an outside source and the difference between the upper and lower parts of the column footings does not represent a change in phasing but rather in materials/technique.

6.3 Fragments of disarticulated human bone recovered during the course of the watching brief were retrieved and re-interred within the church, in the new soak-away pit for the repositioned font.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES CONSULTED

Published Works

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Maps

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Ordnance Survey 1:1250 plan, 1972.

Unpublished Material

BaRAS 2010. *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Watching Brief* at the church of St John the Baptist, Midsomer Norton, Bath & North-East Somerset.

8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BaRAS would like to thank Trevor Eastell of EG Design Ltd. and Ross Banwell and the staff of Ellis & Co. Ltd. of Shepton Mallet for their assistance and co-operation during the project.

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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 that would affect a SAM.

GOVERNMENT POLICY GUIDANCE
Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994) and Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (1990) have been replaced (23 March 2010) by Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010) which sets out the Government's national policies on conservation of the historic environment. Those parts of the historic environment that have significance because of their historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest are called heritage assets.

Of particular relevance within the Planning Policy Statement are:

Policy HE6: Information Requirements for Applications for Consent Affecting Heritage Assets
HE6.1 Local planning authorities should require an applicant to provide a description of the significance of the heritage assets affected and the contribution of their setting to that significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of the heritage asset. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets themselves should have been assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary given the application's impact. Where an application site includes, or is considered to have the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where desk-based research is insufficient to properly assess the interest, a field evaluation.

Policy HE9: Additional Policy Principles Guiding the Consideration of Applications for Consent Relating to Designated Heritage Assets
HE9.1 There should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets and the more significant the designated heritage asset, the greater the presumption in favour of its conservation should be. Once lost, heritage assets cannot be replaced and their loss has a cultural, environmental, economic and social impact. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Loss affecting any designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I or II* listed buildings and grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

Policy HE12: Policy Principles Guiding the Recording of Information Related to Heritage Assets
HE12.3 Where the loss of the whole or a material part of a heritage asset's significance is justified, local planning authorities should require the developer to record and advance understanding of the significance of the heritage asset before it is lost, using planning conditions or obligations as appropriate. The extent of the requirement should be proportionate to the nature and level of the asset's significance. Developers should publish this evidence and deposit copies of the reports with the relevant historic environment record. Local planning authorities should require any archive generated to be deposited with a local museum or other public depository willing to receive it. Local planning authorities should impose planning conditions or obligations to ensure such work is carried out in a timely manner and that the completion of the exercise is properly secured.

LOCAL POLICIES

The Planning Policy Statement of Archaeology and Planning (PPS 15) consolidates advice to planning authorities. The Guidance stresses the non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource, details the role of the Local Authority Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), encourages early consultation with county and district council archaeological officers and sets out the requirement for developers to provide sufficient information on the impact of a development on the archaeological resource to enable a reasoned planning decision to be taken.

PPS 15 also indicates the circumstances where further work would be necessary and outlines the use of agreements and conditions to protect the archaeological resource.

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan including waste and minerals policies Revised Deposit Draft 2003 as approved for used for Development Control purposes contains the following policies:

Policy BH.11 – Development which would adversely affect Scheduled Ancient Monuments or any other sites of national importance, and their settings and does not preserve such sites in situ will not be permitted.

Policy BH.12 – Development which would harm important archaeological remains or their settings outside the scope of Policy BH.11 will not be permitted unless the adverse impact of the development proposal on the remains can be mitigated.

Policy BH.13 – Development which adversely affects significant archaeological remains within Bath will not be permitted unless the preservation in situ of these remains can be achieved through a detailed design and construction scheme.

Two Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents *'Archaeology in Bath & North-East Somerset*' and *'Archaeology in the City of Bath'* (both 2004) have been adopted. Their principal purpose is to supplement Policies BH.11, BH.12 & BH.13 of the existing and emerging Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan and should be read in conjunction with these.

APPENDIX 2: Context Descriptions

Context No.	Description
Trench 1	
100	Unstratified finds number.
101	Surface of large, rectangular, Lias limestone floor slabs. Up to 1.2 x 1.3m in size and 100mm thick. Slabs are bedded on cream coloured lime mortar. Some reutilisation of reused masonry – possibly from an earlier phase of church structure.
102	Earlier surface of slabs below (101) slightly rougher appearance than upper surface and generally smaller sized slabs (average 600mm x 600mm x up to 80mm thick).
103	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small limestone rubble fragment and lime mortar inclusions.
104	Lens of pale grey – white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment and charcoal inclusions.
105	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small lime mortar and limestone rubble fragment inclusions.
106	Mortar lens – white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment and charcoal inclusions.
107	Deep layer (600mm) of redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small – large limestone rubble fragment inclusions.
Trench 2	
201	Stepped wall foundations exposed.
202	Stepped base for fluted column adjoining wall 2.
203	Lower floor surface as exposed in Trench 1 (see 102).
204	Deposit of white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment inclusions up to 180mm thick below surface (203).
205	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 300mm thick.
206	Mortar lens – white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment and charcoal inclusions, up to 100mm thick.
207	Deep layer (650 mm thick) of redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small – large limestone rubble fragment inclusions.
Trench 3	
300	Lower floor surface as exposed in Trench 1 (see 102).
301	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 300mm thick. Below Deposit (309).
302	Mortar deposit – white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment and charcoal inclusions, up to 300mm thick.
303	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small - large limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 300mm thick.
304	Badly damaged culvert – only a few unworked limestone rubble blocks and rare bricks remaining – central cavity approximately 200mm wide x 250 mm high. Rubble bonded with white lime mortar, no capping stones remain in-situ.
305	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small - large limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 250 mm thick.
306	Top course only exposed at base of foundation trench, 500mm wide x < 200mm length, orientated approximately south-west to north-east. Did not subsequently appear in Trench 2.
307	Part of a large, round column base. Constructed of Lias limestone rubble bonded with grey lime mortar. Diameter and height of the structure not fully exposed but diameter suggested to be at least 1m and height exceeds 800mm.
308	Stepped foundation of worked Lias limestone blocks for column C5.
309	Deposit of white lime mortar and rubble up to 300mm thick placed after construction of column base (308).
Trench 4	
401	Stepped wall foundations.
402	Stepped base for fluted column adjoining wall.
403	Lower floor surface as exposed in Trench 1 (see 102).
404	Deposit of white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment inclusions up to 180mm thick below surface (203).

405	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 300 mm thick.
406	Mortar lens – white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment and charcoal inclusions, up to 100mm thick.
407	Deep layer (650mm thick) of redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small – large limestone rubble fragment inclusions.
Trench 5	
500	Lower floor surface as exposed in Trench 1 (see 102)
501	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 300mm thick.(below Deposit (309) in Trench 3).
502	Mortar deposit – white lime mortar with small limestone rubble fragment and charcoal inclusions, up to 300mm thick.
503	Redeposited, reddish brown, sandy, silty clay with small - large limestone rubble fragment inclusions, up to 300 mm thick.
504	Top course only exposed at base of Trench, 500 mm wide x < 200mm length, orientated approximately south-west to north-east. Did not subsequently appear in Trench 2.
505	Part of a large, round column base. Constructed of Lias limestone rubble bonded with grey lime mortar. Diameter and height of the structure not fully exposed but diameter suggested to be at least 1m and height exceeds 800mm.
506	Stepped foundation of worked Lias limestone blocks for column C4.
507	Deposit of white lime mortar and rubble up to 300mm thick placed after construction of column base (308).
Trench 6	
600	Font base – single, large, octagonal piece of Lias limestone with hole in centre for drainage. Very smooth faces on all sides.
601	Concrete slab, 50mm thick with central hole for drainage sat below font base and over sump structure.
Font soak-away pit	Rounded structure of crude mixed Lias and Oolitic limestone rubble with some tool marks apparent. Mostly dry-stone construction but some random patches and whole upper course are mortared (grey lime mortar). Diameter 500mm with a depth of 650mm, no floor visible. Soak-away chamber for the font.

APPENDIX 3: Artefactual Evidence

A small assemblage of unstratified finds was recovered from excavation of the various foundation trenches. A list of the finds follows:

(i) x1 Fragment of clear Window glass, date c 18th century+

(ii) x3 Fragments of white china, date c 18th century+

(iii) x1 Clay tobacco pipe bowl & x1 stem fragment, date c 19th century

(iv) x1 Large iron nail with square shaft, date c 18th century+

(v) x1 Small fragment of reused Oolitic limestone masonry, probably from a round column

(vi) x6 Fragments of disarticulated human bone.

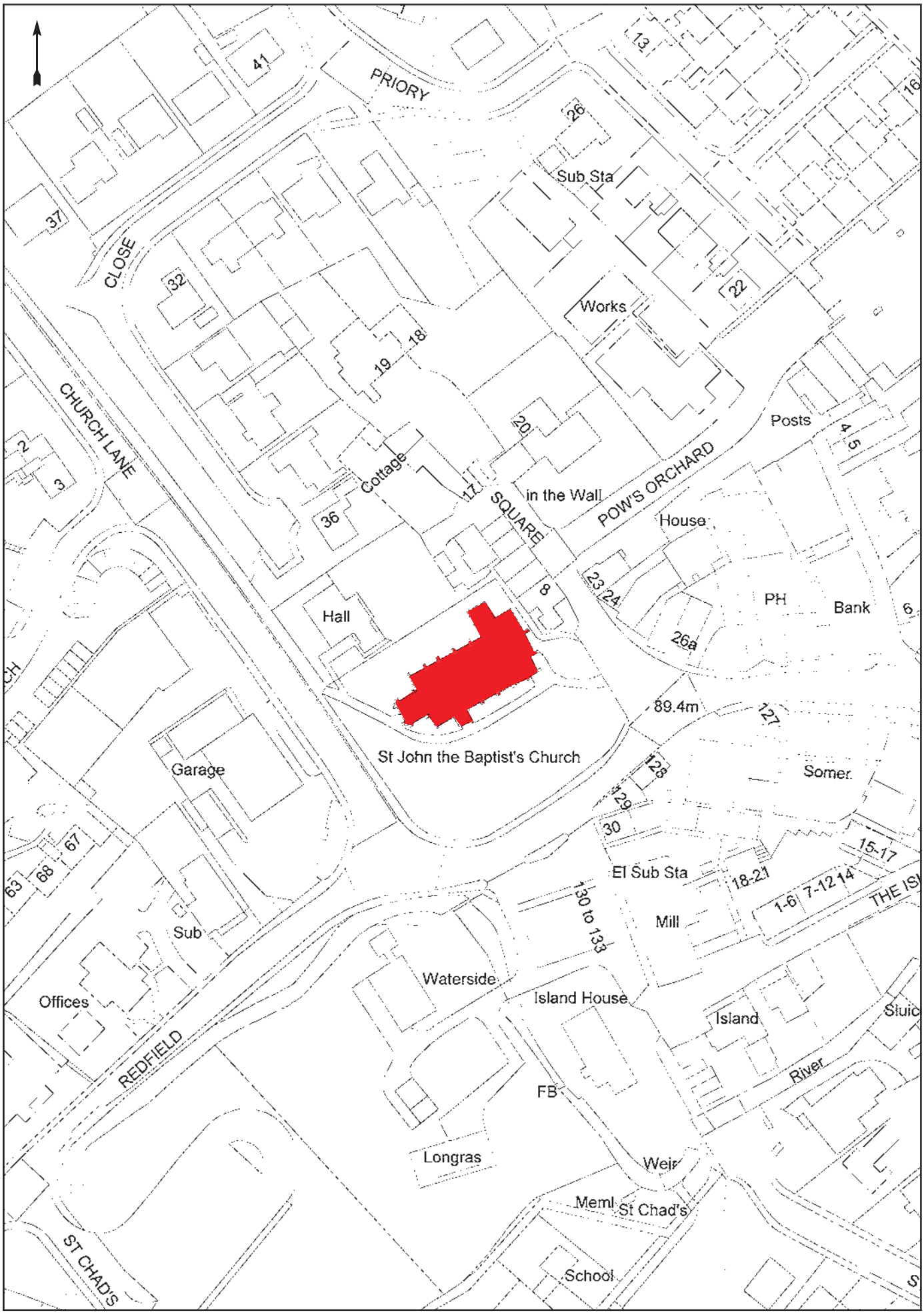

Fig.1 Site location plan, scale 1:1250

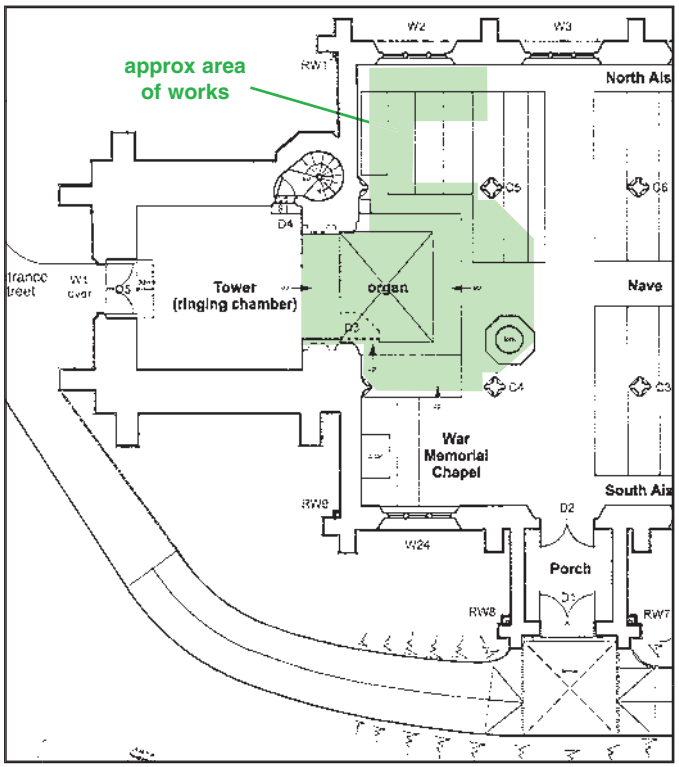

Fig.2
Area of works and location of font

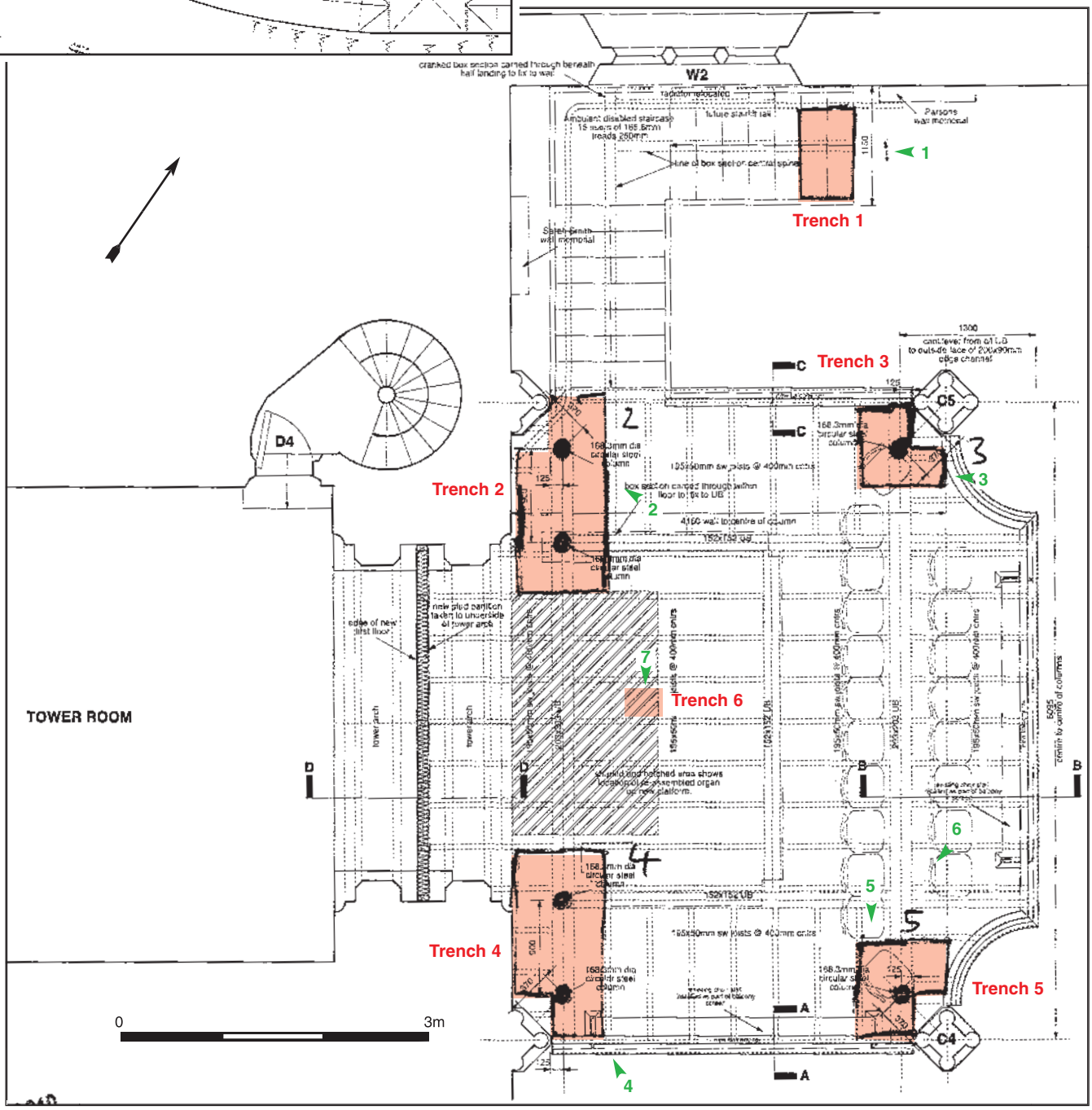

Fig.3 Plan showing location of foundation trenches in detail, with plate orientations in green

Plate 1
Trench 1 as excavated, looking west

Plate 2
Trench 2 as completed, looking north-west

Plate 3
Detail of the rounded column base in Trench 3, looking north-east

Plate 4
Trench 4 as excavated, looking north-west

Plate 5 Trench 5 as excavated, showing similar column base to that in Trench 3, looking south-east

Plate 6 Soakaway pit located beneath the font, looking south

Plate 7 Trench 6 as excavated, looking south