

**Report on an Archaeological Watching  
Brief at 'St Margaret's Church, Paston, Norfolk'**

**ENF 132049**

Prepared for:

Birdsall, Swash & Blackman Ltd.

*on behalf of*

Paston Parochial Church Council

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**Archaeological Report**

**CB319R**

**St Margaret's Church,  
Paston, Norfolk**

**ENF132049**

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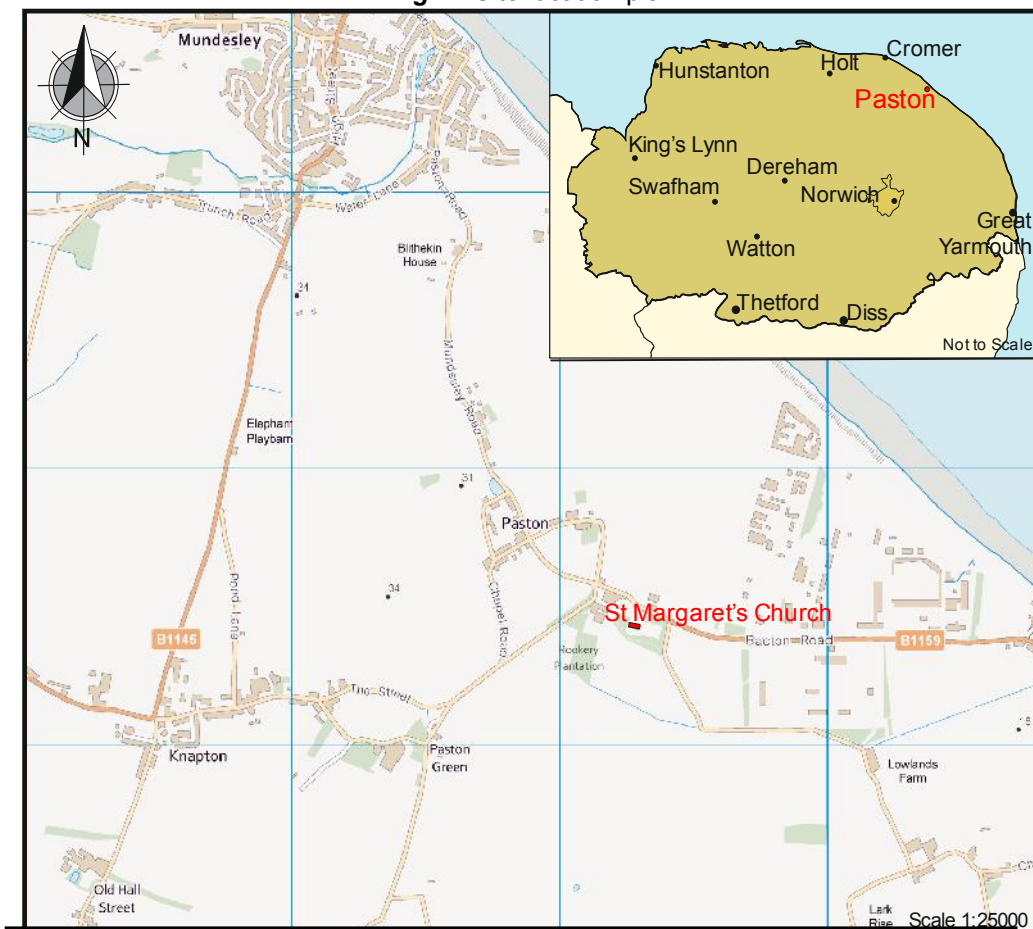
**Summary**

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at ‘St Margaret’s Church, Paston, Norfolk’ (Norfolk Historic Environment Record ENF132049) in November 2013 during groundworks associated with the installation of a new rain water drainage system. No finds or features of archaeological significance were present.

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Archaeological monitoring (“Watching Brief”) was carried out during ground works at ‘St Margaret’s Church, Paston, Norfolk’ (grid reference TG 32292 34466, centred at) and was requested by the Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service.
- 1.2 This report, CB319R, details how Chris Birks undertook these works and summarises the results. A copy has been submitted to the Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service.

**Fig. 1. Site location plan**



**2.0 Project Background**

- 2.1 A proposal for the installation of a new rain water drainage system at ‘St Margaret’s Church, Paston, Norfolk’ was approved subject to a condition for a Programme of Archaeological work. Archaeological monitoring (“Watching Brief”) was required at a level of constant attendance. Repairs to the structure of the church were also carried out by the building contractor.
- 2.2 Archaeological monitoring was undertaken in accordance with a Generic Brief issued by the Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service and a generic Project Design and Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Monitoring (“Watching Briefs”) by Chris Birks (Birks

2004). Specific aims of the project are to determine the presence/absence, date, extent, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological layers or subsoil archaeological features. This forms part of the research agenda for the eastern counties of England in *Research and Archaeology Revisited: A Revised Framework for the East of England* (Medlycott 2011). Contributions to environmental archaeology research aims (Murphy 2000) may also be made. Full details of research aims, methodology and standards are provided in the Project Design.

- 2.3 Norfolk Historic & Environment Record (NHER) number ENF132049; Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) ID: chrisbir-168577.
- 2.4 The site archive will be held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, in accordance with the relevant policy on archiving standards.

### **3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 3.1 The archaeological and historical background contains much from the Parish Summary for Paston on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website, written by Piet Aldridge, 12 February 2007 and with additions and alterations by the author. Information is included from the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) and further details of these and all other entries can be seen at the Historic Environment Record office at Gressenhall near Dereham by prior appointment.
- 3.2 Paston's name comes from the Old English for 'enclosure by the small pools' (Rye, 1991). The parish has a long history and was certainly well established by the time of the Norman Conquest, its population, land ownership and productive resources being extensively detailed in the Domesday Book of 1086.
- 3.3 The earliest evidence of human activity comes in the form of prehistoric but otherwise undateable flint tools, for example flakes (NHERs 32880, 33954, 41584 and 44073) and a scraper and a blade (NHER 36205). Artefacts dating to the Neolithic period (4000 to 2351BC) include polished flint axeheads (NHERs 6876, 6888, 6889 and 6891), chipped axeheads (NHER 6888 and 6890) and a scraper (NHER 6889). A stone axehammer (NHER 6886) found in 1933 may be of Neolithic or Bronze Age date.
- 3.4 Aerial photographs show the cropmark of a possible Bronze Age (2350 to 701BC) ring ditch (NHER 39008) to the west of the parish; the remains of the surrounding ditches of long-since levelled burial mounds. Bronze Age copper alloy finds include axeheads (NHER 40669 and 40670) and a hoard of at least three palstaves and a further axehead (NHER 6877) found near a World War Two coastal gun emplacement in 1945.
- 3.5 Iron Age (800BC to AD42) finds include pottery fragments (NHER 6879) and a coin (NHER 40669), and the study of aerial photographs has tentatively identified the cropmarks of an Iron Age to Roman farmstead (NHER 39016). The Roman period (AD43 to 409) is represented in the finds assemblage by coins (NHERs 32156, 40669 and 40677) and pottery fragments (NHERs 6880, 6893 and 32880), and the cropmarks of a field boundary (NHER 27279) and a trackway, enclosure and field system (NHER 39010) have been identified from aerial photographs.
- 3.6 Saxon (AD410 to 1065) finds include a whole pottery jar (NHER 6892) found in 1900, pottery fragments (NHERs 6892, 6894 and 6895), a coin pendant (NHER 6881), a coin and brooch (NHER 40669) and a strap fitting (NHER 44074).
- 3.7 The medieval period (AD1066 to 1509) has left the parish with its oldest surviving building, St Margaret's Church (NHER 6913). This fine Grade I listed 14<sup>th</sup> century and later thatched church was built on the site of an earlier church on a pilgrims' route between Broomholm Priory and a hostel and chapel at Stow Hill and has a modest 15<sup>th</sup> century south porch. The medieval Paston family who lived in the nearby hall contributed much money to Broomholm Priory (NHER 1073) near Bacton and were buried there, so St Margaret's, their local church, was left a comparatively

plain affair, yet resplendent in its own way. When the church was built, wall paintings covered the walls inside and some of these were rediscovered in the 1920s. On the north wall is the top half of a patriarchal St Christopher crossing a river with the Christ Child on his shoulder, and further along, part of a 'three living and three dead' painting, with three animated noblemen and skeletons. This theme was very popular in the years following the Black Death. There is a rood screen of probable 15<sup>th</sup> century date in the church.

- 3.8 There are several early 17<sup>th</sup> century memorials to the Paston family in the chancel by the famous sculptor Nicholas Stone, one of which was brought here from Broomholm Priory during the Dissolution. On the north side, and the reason why the window here is blocked, are two enormous memorials; one featuring a life-size figure of Dame Katherine Paston (who died in 1628) reclining beneath a black, white and pink alabaster confection of pillars, arches, figures and a crowned skull. Next to this, and by the same sculptor, is a classical-style memorial to the Dame's widower, Sir Edmund Paston (who died in 1632).
- 3.9 Medieval finds in the parish include coins (NHERs 32611, 40669 and 40670), pottery fragments (NHERs 6894, 6895, 32880 and 36205), buckles (NHER 32156 and 32611) and a pilgrim bottle (NHER 40669).
- 3.10 Of the 16<sup>th</sup> century mansion and buildings of the Paston family, only the Great Barn is preserved (NHER 6896). This enormous thatched structure is of flint and brick with stone dressings and has two inscriptions attributing it to Sir William Paston in 1581. Two full height double doors to the east are flanked by stepped buttresses and further buttresses appear at intervals between the slit ventilation lights. Inside is a magnificent roof of alternating hammerbeam and tie-beam trusses. The roof span is not actually great enough to necessitate hammerbeams and it is likely that they are there for show.
- 3.11 There had been plans to turn the barn into a visitor centre, but these were dropped in 2002 so that a colony of rare bats would not be disturbed. It was later designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest as a sanctuary for bats. Bats have indeed caused issues during the current works on the church. The present Paston Hall, a short distance to the south, is a 19<sup>th</sup> century two-storey pale brick building, converted to a hotel.
- 3.12 Post-medieval (AD 1540 to 1900) buildings include Beech cottage and Forge Cottage (NHER 46643); a pair of late 17<sup>th</sup> century and later thatched two-storey flint and brick houses, The Green Farmhouse (NHER 47680); a three-storey flint and brick farmhouse with a 17<sup>th</sup> century core and a late 18<sup>th</sup> century façade under a slate roof, and Heath Cottage (NHER 47737); a brick two-storey mid-19<sup>th</sup> century labourer's cottage.
- 3.13 Stow Hill Windmill (NHER 6882) lies in the north of the parish. A famous landmark of the north Norfolk landscape, this tarred brick tower mill was built in 1827. It was converted to a house in 1930 then damaged by lightning in 1955. After many years of work it was fully restored and with its timber cap, sails and fantail, it is an impressive monument.
- 3.14 Part of the Norfolk and Suffolk Joint Railway (NHER 13585) ran through the parish. This was a late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century railway, running from East Runton to North Walsham via Cromer, Overstrand, Trimingham, Mundesley, Paston and Knapton. The Cromer to Mundesley section was closed in 1953 and the other sections were closed in 1964. Paston station and a number of bridges and embankments survive.
- 3.15 Abinger Cottage on Vicarage Road (NHER 41781) is a thatched house of irregular plan, built in 1912 by a student of the architect Edwin Lutyens.
- 3.16 On the northern coast is Mundesley Holiday Camp (NHER 34570). Opened in 1933, this was the first purpose-built fully catered holiday camp in Norfolk and only the second in Britain. Its plan was intended to mirror the sails of Paston Mill. During World War Two, the camp and its surroundings were used as a military training camp (NHER 39109). A variety of different military



features are visible on contemporary aerial photographs, including slit trenches, pillboxes, concrete and earthwork gun and/or searchlight emplacements, spigot mortar emplacements, barbed wire and various huts and buildings. Although post-war photographs indicate that the clearance of military structures from the area had begun by 1946, it is possible that some elements may survive, either hidden by vegetation or as levelled earthworks and structures.

#### **4.0 Geology and Topography**

- 4.1 The parish of Paston is situated in northeast Norfolk, southeast of Mundesley and northwest of Bacton. It lies upon a solid geology of Norwich Crag (Funnell 2005) with overlying Norwich Brickearth deposits and glacial sands and gravels (Funnell 1994). The soil landscape characterised as that of Rich Loams with exceptionally fertile soils formed in wind-blown loess overlying a variety of glacial deposits (Williamson 2005).
- 4.2 The church lies to the southeast of Paston village, on generally level ground at an elevation of c. 22m OD then sloping down to c. 19m OD beyond the south side of the churchyard.

#### **5.0 Observations**

- 5.1 Monitoring was carried out in November 2013 during excavations associated with the installation of the new rain water drainage system (*Fig. 2*). Deposits were scanned with a metal detector. No context numbers were allocated due to the lack of archaeological remains.
- 5.2 Site conditions were good and access was gained from Bacton Road to the north of the church. The weather remained dry and sunny but cold.
- 5.3 Trenches associated with rain water drains measured c. 0.3m wide and were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m beneath present ground level removing c. 0.3m of dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil and mid brown sandy loam subsoil, the full extent of which was not reached (*Plate 1*). Very few fragments of human bone were recovered from the trenches and were subsequently reburied. No finds or features of archaeological significance were present.

**Plate 1.** Sample view of drainage trench, looking approximately west



- 5.4 Soakaways measured approximately 2m by 2m and were excavated to a maximum depth of 2m beneath present ground level removing c. 0.3m of dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil and c. 0.8m mid brown sandy loam subsoil. Subsoil overlay brownish silty sand undisturbed 'natural' deposits with occasional small to medium sized rounded flints, the full extent of which was not reached. Approximately 25 fragments of human bone were recovered during excavation of the soakaways and were reburied. No finds or features of archaeological significance were present.
- 5.5 Reports were made to the media about the discovery of some probable medieval wall paintings whilst the building contractor was repairing some cracks in the wall above the chancel arch. Medieval wall painting specialist Dr Andrea Kirkham confirmed that they are medieval and started work on a preliminary exploration and treatment.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 Monitoring carried out during groundworks associated with the installation of a new rain water drainage system did not reveal any finds or features of archaeological significance. The exact reasons for this are unknown, any archaeological remains may be located beyond the minimal excavated areas or any such remains may simply lie beyond the boundaries of the churchyard.
- 6.2 No specific information was gained from the human bone recovered during the excavations due to the fragmentary nature of the remains. They are typically found in such locations and are the result of the disturbance of earlier graves through successive grave digging over centuries of use.



## **Acknowledgments**

The project was undertaken by Chris Birks on behalf of the PCC of Paston who also funded the work. Fieldwork was undertaken by John Simmons. The report was written by Chris Birks and John Simmons.

Many thanks to the PCC, Ruth Blackman at Birdsall, Swash & Blackman Ltd and W.S. Lusher Limited.

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## Appendix 1 OASIS Record

**OASIS ID: [chrisbir1-168577](#)**

### Project details

Project name	Archaeological monitoring at 'St Margaret's Church, Paston'
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring was carried out in November 2013 during groundworks associated with the installation of a new rain water drainage system. No finds or features of archaeological significance were present.
Project dates	Start: 19-11-2013 End: 22-11-2013
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ENF132049 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	CHURCH Medieval
Monument type	CHURCHYARD Medieval
Significant Finds	HUMAN BONE Uncertain
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	NORFOLK NORTH NORFOLK PASTON St Margaret's Church, Paston
Study area	1000.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TG 32292 34466 52 1 52 51 25 N 001 27 03 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 21.00m Max: 21.00m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Chris Birks
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Chris Birks
Project director/manager	Chris Birks
Project supervisor	Chris Birks
Type of sponsor/funding body	Parochial Church Council

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive Exists?	No
Paper Archive recipient	Norfolk Museums Service
Paper Archive ID	ENF132049
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Unpublished Text"

### Project bibliography

1





Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at 'St Margaret's Church, Paston, Norfolk'
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Other bibliographic details	Report Number CB319R
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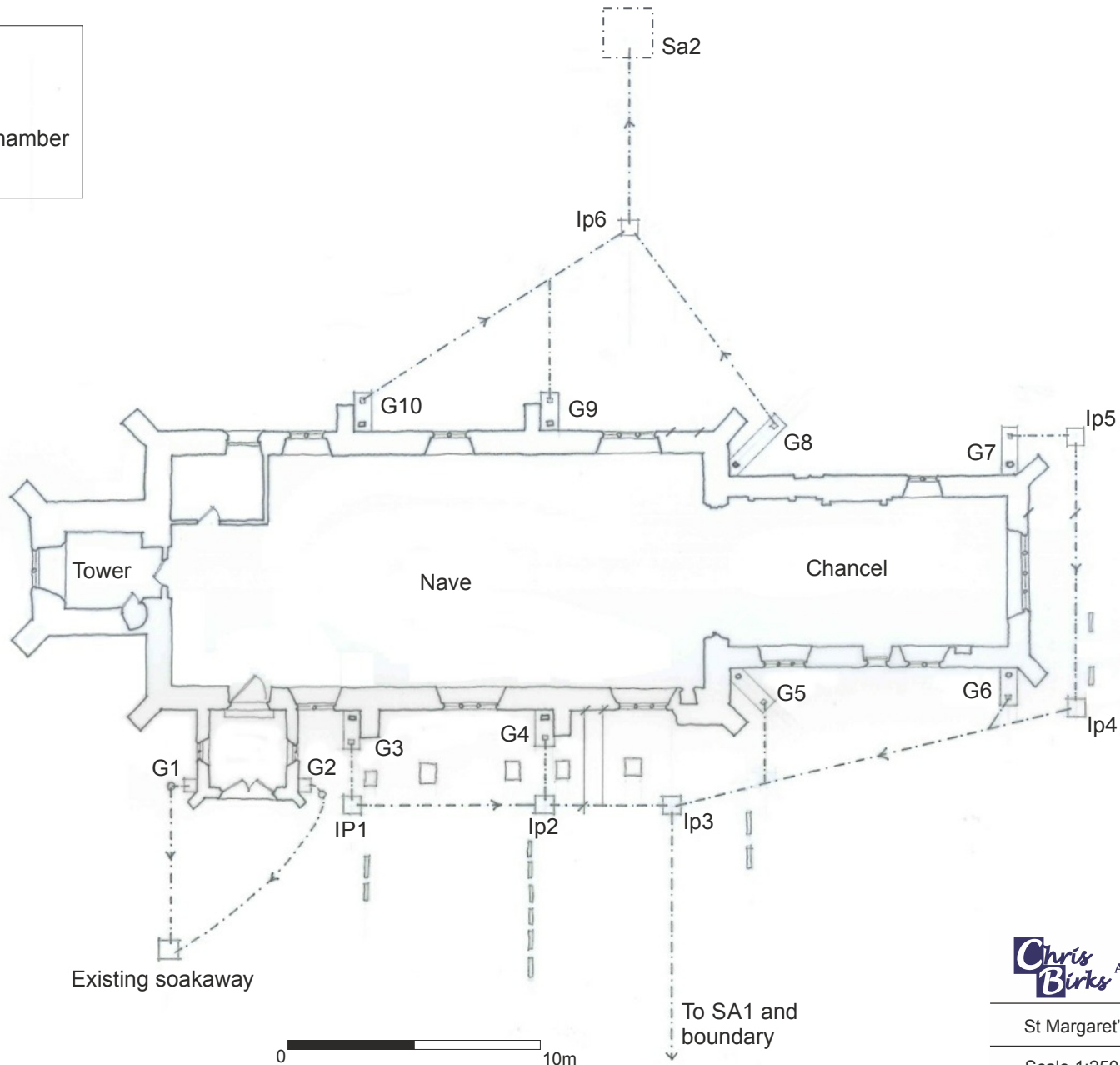
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-  New drains
-  G1 Gulley
-  IP1 Inspection chamber
-  Sa1 Soakaway



Based on a drawing kindly provided by Ruth Blackman

**Chris Birks** Archaeological Services - Urban & Rural

St Margaret's Church, Paston, Norfolk

Scale 1:250

Report Number CB319R

**Figure 2.** Site plan